

NARCISSUS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY:

MARY SHELLEY AND NIETZSCHE

by

Christopher Noall Wootton

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

The Department of Languages and Literature

The University of Utah

May 2010

Copyright © Christopher Noall Wootton

All Rights Reserved

STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

The thesis of Christopher Noall Wootton

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

<u>Joseph Metz</u>	, Chair	<u>March 15, 2010</u> <small>Date Approved</small>
--------------------	---------	---

<u>Margaret M. Toscano</u>	, Member	<u>March 15, 2010</u> <small>Date Approved</small>
----------------------------	----------	---

<u>Erin A. O'Connell</u>	, Member	<u>March 15, 2010</u> <small>Date Approved</small>
--------------------------	----------	---

and by Jane Hacking, Chair of
the Department of Languages and Literature

and by Charles A. Wight, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Narcissus theme and narcissism in the literature of the nineteenth century, focusing on the theme as it is reflected in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, especially the dramatic shift in perspective towards narcissism reflected in these two works. Historical and cultural changes over the course of the nineteenth century that may have led to this reversal are discussed, and it is suggested that the earlier negative view of narcissism is bound with a theological concept of the "self" that is no longer compatible with the understanding of humanity's radically animal nature. A positive view of narcissism in Nietzsche's writing may reflect a vacuum in the traditional understanding of the "self" that demands "self-creation." Narcissistic expression may also represent a liberation from the superstitious awe surrounding the former, more theological concept of the "self" and from the moral constraints of the theology from which this derived. Analysis of the Narcissus theme, beginning with Ovid's version of the tale in the *Metamorphoses* then moving into the nineteenth-century works, reveals common strands in all the depictions of narcissism discussed. The analysis concludes that while Nietzsche assumes a positive stance towards a narcissistic pose, the self-idealization reflected in his work is as illusory as the negatively reflected narcissism of the earlier versions, and that below the surface of Nietzsche's jubilant tone the philosophical voice of his work seems as haunted by the idealized self-image he has created as the hero of Shelley's novel.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. OVID’S STORY OF NARCISSUS.....	14
III. MARY SHELLEY’S <i>FRANKENSTEIN</i>	27
IV. NIETZSCHE’S <i>ZUR GENEALOGIE DER MORAL</i>	49
V. CONCLUSION.....	83
WORKS CITED.....	88

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the Narcissus theme and narcissism in the literature of the nineteenth century, focusing in particular on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. The study specifically examines the dramatic shift in perspective towards narcissism reflected in these two works. Prior to the nineteenth century and through the first part of it, literary works have usually taken a dim view of the tendency towards narcissism. Shelley's novel presents a dramatic example of this, portraying narcissistic self-idealization as cruel, self-destructive and potentially catastrophic, while Nietzsche represents a reversal of this orientation, assuming and even embracing a narcissistic posture in his philosophy. In *Zur Genealogie der Moral* he presents it as an attribute of the figure who shall "restore to the earth its aim." (*GM* 230). Historical and cultural changes before and during the nineteenth century may have led to this reversal. During the previous two centuries science and reason had been changing humanity's view of the world and of itself, drawing attention away from God as the source of truth, and the secularizing effect of this was profoundly felt by the nineteenth century. This shift of human focus away from God was dramatically intensified in the middle of the nineteenth century, through the work of Charles Darwin, whose discovery of the laws of natural selection seemed to sound the final death knell to any traditionally

religious notions of the significance of human existence. It may be that the earlier negative view of narcissism was bound to a theological concept of the “self” that was no longer compatible with the understanding of humanity’s radically animal nature. Perhaps this understanding both created a vacuum in the understanding of the “self” that demanded “self-creation,” and drove away the shadows of superstitious awe surrounding the former concept of the “self” and the relationship of this to God, thus allowing the freedom to “self-create,” and to celebrate that self-creation. In this way Nietzsche’s superior individual steps into the place left by God, as did Victor Frankenstein in Shelley’s novel—a theme that links the two works. But whereas an ominous air of foreboding and looming destruction hovers around this usurpation in *Frankenstein*, Nietzsche’s work seems to hail self-creation and self-celebration with newfound freedom. This study will examine these themes of narcissism and stepping into the role of God, and the interconnection of these themes in Shelley’s novel and Nietzsche’s philosophical work. Some preliminary discussion of the Narcissus theme and especially its place in the nineteenth century is necessary to this study, as is a grounding in the theme through an analysis of Ovid’s version of the Narcissus tale: the version that has given the story its most influential expression.

The ancient story of Narcissus, the beautiful, scornful boy who broke hearts until he finally broke his own, has cast a long shadow over Western culture and literature since Ovid gave the story its most lasting form in his *Metamorphoses*. Recurrence of the story and allusion to it in literature of various periods and traditions, its resonance in modern psychoanalysis as well as popular language and culture—all of this suggests that the story touches upon something deep in human experience. The different associations with

Narcissus and narcissism vary widely; what unites them is the connotation of self-enamorment, of which the tale of Narcissus serves as a sort of prototype. Although in recent times the whole notion of a “self” has fallen into question or been denied altogether, the experience of the “self” and the particular response to that experience portrayed in Ovid’s tale seem to have been a major source of the story’s timeless fascination. It is interesting to note that although the word “narcissism” has been applied differently throughout its history, what is now commonly meant by it is not radically different from the self-infatuation Ovid’s narration captured. Nevertheless, a superficial and simplistically moralizing view of this self-infatuation does not do justice to its existential and moral dimensions in the story. It is hoped that this study will cast a penetrating ray into those depths, in its examination of the theme as it is presented in Ovid’s tale and its variations in later works, especially the reversal of perspective on the theme represented by the two nineteenth-century writers, who over the course of that century present a reversal of perspective on an ancient theme.

For the purposes of this thesis, “narcissism” does not carry the psychoanalytic implications attached to it by Freud. The theme of narcissism as it is explored here in fact does not borrow from any technical or otherwise established definition of the term, but is a study of what literary texts capture about self-enamorment in their depictions of human behavior and their insights into the human soul, how such self-enamorment molds one’s view of the world and what consequences follow from a world view so molded. Immediately apparent is the fact that this definition incorporates at least one assumption that is highly disputed in contemporary literary spheres and which therefore ought to be addressed: that there is a “human soul” to peer into. Depending on how “soul” is defined

there is nothing necessarily theological about this assumption. Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the primary authors to be discussed in this study, was among the first to vehemently and categorically refute the existence of the human “soul” or “subject” with his famous declaration, “es giebt kein 'Sein' hinter dem Thun, Wirken, Werden; der Thäter ist zum Thun bloss hinzugedichtet—das Thun ist Alles.” (“But no such agent exists; there is no 'being' behind the doing, acting, becoming; the 'doer' has simply been added to the deed [doing] by the imagination—the deed is everything.”)¹ Nevertheless he himself speaks routinely throughout *Zur Genealogie der Moral* about “Werthungsweisen” (ways of evaluating), by which he essentially means a world view; and this assumes some locus in the individual where such a world view has its place. For present purposes nothing more must necessarily be added to the definition of “soul” here. A sense of “self”—a sense of who one is and how one fits into one's world—is part of that world view, and a particularly important one for the purposes of this study, since narcissism is a particular kind of relationship with the “self.” It is acknowledged that the notion of a “self” is highly disputed in current intellectual and especially literary discourse. But this dispute seems to be primarily over the ultimate source, autonomy or possibly the ultimate meaning of the “self.” Comparatively few thinkers doubt that there are such things as thoughts, desires, motivations, values, interests, capabilities or any of the other numerous aspects that are thought to constitute one's personhood; at least, all of these terms are regularly used without embarrassment. The “self” seems a useful designation for the totality of these elements in the individual, the various social, physical, linguistic and

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift* (Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam jun., 2003) 35 (hereafter cited as *ZGM* to distinguish it from the English translation).

other forces that determine (or even construct) certain aspects of the “self” notwithstanding.² Possibly more problematic is that in this study, the “real self” is distinguished from the “idealized self,” which is considered to be illusory. If, as is usually not doubted, it is possible to perceive one's own thoughts, desires, motivations, values, as well as the other aspects that one considers to constitute “oneself,” then it should follow that it is possible to perceive these more accurately or less accurately. Dispute of this assertion constitutes a dispute over the existence of these aspects themselves or of one's ability to perceive them, and is no longer a dispute of the existence of a “self” per se. Since ultimately it is possible to dispute the existence of anything, we must either take the existence of some things for granted, or suspend belief in them to some extent if we want to talk about them at all.

Since self-idealization is central to this study of narcissism, this requires definition as well. For purposes of this analysis, self-idealization is the tendency not to see “oneself” (as the “self” has been defined) as one is, but an improvement, even a best thinkable (or unthinkable) version of this according to whatever values from which one is operating, even if this bears no obvious similarity to the “real self.” The latter is the “self” (again as this has been defined) accurately perceived, as far as this is possible. It does not need to be assumed here that the “real self” is ever seen in any absolute or unmediated way—or even that it would resemble some coherent unity if it could be—

² The unconscious is often presented as an entity that particular problematizes the notion of a “self” since it is (by definition) a dimension of oneself of which one is unaware. But this does not constitute an objection to the idea of a “self” as it is presented here. The totality of those elements that make up the self can as easily incorporate aspects of which one is unaware, as any other conceivable totality can contain unknown or unperceived aspects, in spite of the fact that any such totality is as mediated by perception and conceptualization as the “self.”

only that the various elements of what one considers to be “oneself” may be more accurately perceived in some cases than in others, and that the abandonment of that effort in favor of some much more favorable self-image is what constitutes self-idealization.³ Enamorment with that idealized self-image is narcissism. This definition is borrowed in part from Spaas, who himself claims to borrow from Ovid, in defining self-idealization as enamorment with an image of a “self that tends to become idealized.”⁴ Based on the analyses of the works examined in this paper, an externalization or projection of that idealized image, in some way, upon the outside world might seem also to belong to this definition; whether that must necessarily be the case is difficult to say, and is perhaps beyond the scope of this study to determine.

From Ovid’s time until long into the modern age, a certain consistency can be observed in attitudes towards narcissism in Western literature across vastly different cultural landscapes. As has already been mentioned, a designation of a certain disposition and relationship towards the “self”—and especially the characterization of the personality exemplifying these—“narcissism” has usually been regarded negatively. It is not surprising that this would be true of the Christian tradition, in which an individual’s tendency towards self-infatuation can be regarded as a threat to a proper relation to God

³ The word “idealization,” without respect to the “self” is perhaps a more difficult word to define, especially given its complex history within philosophy, literature and culture in general. Since “idealization” is only used in this study in relation to “self-idealization,” a working definition with respect to this can also be offered. “Idealization” in this study refers to the projection of the ideal self upon the outside world: the sense that the outside world reflects or should reflect the values, importance or even image of the idealized self. An example might be a sense that destiny is shaping or should shape the world according to the values (and/or the benefit) of the “idealized self.”

⁴ Lieve Spaas, introduction, Echoes of Narcissus, by various authors (New York: Oxford, 2000) 2.

and to others—the sense that Milton gives the theme in his allusion to the myth in *Paradise Lost*. It is somewhat more surprising that it would be true of Ovid himself, who in spite of his characteristically humorous style and ironic distance instills the story with a profound moral poignancy.

During the course of the nineteenth century, as has been mentioned, a different stance towards narcissism emerges, which seems in part to be due to profound cultural changes. Over the course of the previous two centuries science and reason had been changing humanity's view of the world and of itself. Discoveries of the laws of nature and especially the supplanting of the Ptolemaic cosmology drew attention away from God and towards science as a means of obtaining truth, and the Enlightenment had deposed faith and enthroned reason. The secularizing effect of these developments is profoundly felt by the nineteenth century. Writing in 1799, Novalis voices a lament not uncommon among those who saw reason to deplore the increasing secularization of European society: “Es waren schöne glänzende Zeiten, wo Europa ein christliches Land war...” (“Those were beautiful, splendid times when Europe was a Christian land”), following this pronouncement with expressions of regret over the displacement of faith particularly by a scientific mindset that reduced the world to the status of “ein unbedeutender Wandelstern” (“an insignificant planet”) and the cosmic order to that of “tote Gesetzwirkung” (“dead effect of [natural] law”).⁵ Mary Shelley is clearly thematizing this enthronement of science in her novel *Frankenstein*, which seems to contain a warning toward an age of scientific arrogance ushered in by this development.

⁵ Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), “Die Christenheit oder Europa,” in Fragmente und Studien und Die Christenheit oder Europa, ed. Carl Paschek (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam, 1984) 67, 69.

In that novel, science is spoken of with the same fervency once reserved for the holy, which it seems to have replaced; but throughout literature of the early nineteenth century other pursuits and entities, such as romantic love, art or nature, have absorbed some of this free-floating quality of the divine as well. In Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinde*, the character Julius, the narrative voice through most of the novel, says, “Wir sind dankbar und zufrieden mit dem was die Götter wollen und was sie in der heiligen Schrift der schönen Natur so klar angedeutet haben.” (“We are grateful and content with what the gods want, and what they have so clearly intimated in the holy scripture of beautiful nature.”)⁶ And throughout the novel, as is typical in much European literature of the romantic era, romantic love is treated religiously and imbued throughout with the quality of the divine: “Aber die volle Harmonie fand er allein in Lucindens Seele, wo die Keime alles Herrlichen und alles Heiligen nur auf den Strahl seines Geistes warteten, um sich zur schönsten Religion zu entfalten.” (“But the full harmony he found only in the soul of Lucinde, where the seeds of everything glorious and holy only waited upon the ray of his spirit, to unfold itself to the most beautiful religion”) (85). It is perhaps no coincidence that the Narcissus theme begins making a prominent appearance in literature of this era, and in fact figures importantly in both of these novels. Its appearance in *Frankenstein* will be a major subject of focus in this study. In *Lucinde* it figures explicitly as a contrast to the fulfillment of mutual love for another:

Wenn ein Gemüth voll unbewußter Liebe da, wo es Gegenliebe hoffte,
sich selbst findet, wird es von Erstaunen getroffen. Doch bald läßt sich
der Mensch wieder durch den Zauber der Anschauung locken und

⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde*, ed. Karl Konrad Polheim (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam jun., 2008) 85. Translation is mine.

täuschen, seinen Schatten zu lieben....Der Geist verliert sich in seiner klaren Tiefe und findet sich wie Narcissus als Blume wieder.

When a soul filled with unconscious love finds itself, where it had hoped for mutual love, it is struck by amazement. Yet soon the person is enticed and deceived by the magic of the sight into loving his own shadow. The spirit loses itself in its clear depths and, like Narcissus, finds itself again as a flower.(87)

The theme appears less explicitly as well within the relationship seemingly typifying the sublime heights such mutual love is capable of reaching, as Lucinde says to Julius:

“Nicht ich, mein Julius, bin die die Du so heilig mahlst,...Du bists, es ist die Wunderblume Deiner Fantasie, die Du in mir, die ewig Dein ist, dann erblickst...” (“not I, my Julius, am she whom you paint with such holiness,...It is you, it is the wondrous flower of your imagination, which you see in me, who am eternally yours”) (114).

Although Julius' and Lucinde's love is depicted as joyous, devoted and true, in light of the earlier reference to Narcissus a certain irony is unmistakable here—irony which Julius does not seem at all to perceive, for he understands her words as modesty and flattery (thus confirming the truth concealed in Lucinde's ironic observation): “Laß die Bescheidenheit und schmeichele nicht,” “Leave off your modesty and do not flatter” (114).

Might there be a connection between this extension of the sense of the holy to secular things, and Narcissus? It may be that the appearance of the theme of Narcissus signals the need, born of the displacement of God from the center of human focus and meaning, to step into that role and recreate the “self” as well, whose significance had been understood so intimately with reference to the Divine. However this may be, the basic stand toward narcissism is still fundamentally the same as Ovid's at this point. In spite of the optimistic portrayal of love in *Lucinde*, narcissism is viewed as a barrier to

real love; and even in the case of true love, narcissism keeps the lover from seeing the beloved herself: he is really seeing himself and his own ideal in her. As we shall see, the critique of narcissism in Shelley's novel is similar, though more encompassing and profound.

It has been mentioned that the shift of human focus away from God taking place gradually over the course of a few centuries was dramatically intensified in the middle of nineteenth century through the work of Charles Darwin. For many the discovery of the law of natural selection and the explanations it offered for the origins of all life, including humanity, seemed to announce the end of an era in which some higher divine purpose could any longer be ascribed to human existence. And this in turn may explain, at least in part, the fundamentally different, even opposite orientation towards narcissism appearing in the philosophical works of Friedrich Nietzsche. The profound influence of Darwin⁷ is clearly felt in Nietzsche's philosophy, in particular in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. Nietzsche's figure of the noble "Raubthier"⁸ celebrates the new status of the predator; for if nature itself is "red in tooth and claw," then the predator has long been an unjustly maligned figure. Nietzsche seems to transfer this same logic to the predatorial sort of human being, who, according to Nietzsche, not only has been unfairly vilified by a false and hypocritical moral system, but deserves to be on top of the reigning system of values, rather than banished by it. Again it seems to be no coincidence, when narcissism

⁷ Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, twenty-eight years before Nietzsche published *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, and Darwin is mentioned, though passingly, in the work.

⁸ "Raubthier" or "predatory animal," a word used frequently in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* to designate a heroic figure of exuberant health and strength and the casting off of false morality, is never actually paired with any German equivalent for "noble" ("vornehm"). Nevertheless the appellation is fitting because the figure is an embodiment of the "vornehme Werthungsweise," the system of values held by the superior ones.

appears in Nietzsche's self-characterization of the noble "Raubthier," that a different orientation towards narcissism—a personality type maligned by tradition in the same way the predator has been maligned by culture—is assumed. Narcissism seems to be the fitting posture of the heroic predator Nietzsche depicts; and this depiction bears striking similarities to the narcissistically oriented figure of Victor Frankenstein portrayed in Shelley's novel. Both are analogous to what Ovid captured of narcissism in a more prototypical way two millennia earlier. But the shift in perspective that deems it the appropriate stance and expression of the superior being is as seismic in its way as the reversal of hierarchies Nietzsche calls for. This rather seismic shift in perspective towards an ancient theme is the focus of this study.

Why Nietzsche's philosophy should be the subject of this study should be sufficiently clear at this point. The choice of Shelley's novel as a counterpoint to Nietzsche still requires some justification. Although, as has been mentioned, several works from around the same era could have been chosen for their incorporation of the Narcissus theme, Shelley's novel is particularly appropriate for several reasons. First, the structure of the novel is eminently suitable for the development of the Narcissus theme. The multilayered narrative structure, consisting of narratives within narratives, builds into the novel a quality of reflection not unlike that thematized in Ovid's tale. The same is true of the structure of the story and the characters. Frankenstein's creature is an ideal narrative figure for reflecting Frankenstein himself, and the act of creation builds into the plot a division analogous to that which separates Narcissus from his reflection. The allusion to the Narcissus story in the novel is actually an allusion to an allusion; it draws from John Milton's use of the story in *Paradise Lost*, to which Shelley makes

unmistakable references but also subverts and molds to her own purposes. In this way she incorporates Milton's perspective on this theme, but is able to do something new with it as well; for in spite of this perspective, *Frankenstein* is very much a novel of its age. In its treatment of the Narcissus theme, the novel in a way foreshadows changes later evident in Nietzsche; and it directly thematizes the development of a scientific world view that is in part bringing those changes about. Perhaps more explicitly than any two authors of the nineteenth century Shelley and Nietzsche are both dealing with the problem of stepping into the role of God, of which they seem to take an opposing view. From nearly opposite ends of the nineteenth century and opposite sides of an attitude towards narcissism, Shelley and Nietzsche are in a way opposing mirror images of each other.

Ideally this would be part of a larger study, which would trace the Narcissus theme across several centuries. It might be especially fruitful to examine the treatment of this theme after Nietzsche's time, in the poetry of Rainer Marie Rilke or in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and later in the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, to name a few of its more prominent appearances. Instances of it both earlier in the nineteenth century and in previous centuries would also contribute to a larger picture of this theme and what its manifestations have to say about those works of literature, their authors and the cultures from which they originate. The present study might form a core of that larger inquiry; for perhaps no one work of the nineteenth century affords a broader view of this theme and its reflection of its time than *Frankenstein*; and perhaps no author of the same century gives a more dramatic instance of its transformation within so short a time span, and of the intellectual and cultural transformations this reflects, than

Nietzsche. With respect to Nietzsche particularly, this study is also significant in the closer look it affords themes in the philosopher's writings that have continued to exert profound influence on philosophy, literature and culture up to the present.

Analysis of the theme must begin with an examination of Ovid's narration, which serves as a sort of basis or point of departure from which shifts and transformations in the narcissistic theme can be further examined. Examination of Ovid's tale reveals strands that can be traced in much later manifestations of the theme, and reflect certain core insights that are strikingly resonant still. The first main section will focus on Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, where the theme revolves around two characters, the hero Victor Frankenstein and his creature. Through the portrayal of a character who is driven by mad ambitions and delusions of grandeur and who even in his ruination never entirely abandons a basically narcissistic pose, and his "shadow image" or "alter-ego" whose self-narration contains overt reference to Narcissus (mediated, that is, by Milton's use of the myth) the novel portrays a "narcissistic split" in the self already thematized in Ovid's story.⁹ The final section will consist of an analysis of narcissism in Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. In this work Nietzsche assumes, one could even say flaunts, a narcissistic posture—in a manner not unlike Shelley's tragic hero Frankenstein, though, as has already been mentioned, quite in opposition to the spirit of her novel.

⁹ In order to avoid confusion later, it should be noted here that in this study, Frankenstein's creature is not understood as a narcissistic figure. Rather the creature fills two primary roles with respect to this literary theme: he is (from Frankenstein's perspective) the monstrous outcome of the protagonist's narcissistic ambitions, and the "real other" of the story who is rejected by his maker in favor of Frankenstein's cherished self-idealization.

CHAPTER II

OVID'S STORY OF NARCISSUS

Though Ovid's version of Narcissus is the one that has come down to us, several versions of the tale were known in antiquity.¹⁰ In his version of the story, Ovid combines the story with another originally unrelated to it: the story of Echo, the garrulous mountain nymph who brought upon herself the wrath of Juno by thwarting her in her attempts to catch other nymphs in their dalliances with Jove. Echo detained Juno with her chatter until the other nymphs could flee her wrath, and for this was punished with speech limited to the end of whatever utterances she heard. When Echo becomes enamoured with Narcissus, she conceals herself in the woods and echoes back to him his own words. This intrigues him and piques his desire to meet her until she shows herself, when he cruelly spurns her. She pines away for him, wasting away until nothing but her voice remains. Echo's presence in the Narcissus story gives it greater thematic unity, for she bridges the themes of spurned love and self-infatuation, as well as those of self and other. She pre-figures Narcissus' enchanting self-encounter, while also becoming the only fully formed character among his would-be lovers, and the only character the reader can really feel for. As such, she deepens a sense in which Narcissus brings upon himself

¹⁰ For a synopsis of other versions of the Narcissus tale in antiquity, see Louise Vinge, The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century, (Lund: Gleerups, 1967) 19-22.

his own fate through his cruelty—and more broadly, through the violation of some mysterious principle of the proper relationship to oneself and to others.

It is the ironic mix of innocence and culpability in Narcissus that gives Ovid's telling of this story its peculiar depth and complexity. The initial descriptions of Narcissus emphasize his hard-heartedness, on account of which a scorned admirer utters this curse against him: “‘sic amet ipse licet, sic non potiat amor!’” (“‘May Narcissus/ Love one day, so, himself, and not win over/ The creature whom he loves!’”) ¹¹ Nemesis grants this prayer, which is described as “precibus...justis,” “[a] righteous...plea” (l. 406), conveying the overt sense that Narcissus is in some way deserving of his fate; yet there is an element of innocence in it as well. As in other tales in the *Metamorphoses* in which the innocence of the ill-fated character is more clear, Narcissus accidentally happens upon the encounter that seals his fate, and as the narrative makes clear, he does not know at first that it is his own image that has enchanted him: “sed videat, nescit,” (“what he sees, [he does not know]”) (l. 430)—or, in the words of the oracle, he does not yet “know himself.” Ironically, from his own perspective, his “hard-heartedness” is being overcome by love of another. Spaas has pointed out, “if identity means, in the first instance, recognising oneself, it would seem that Narcissus’ failure to recognize himself denotes a lack of identity” (Spaas 7). Not only is Narcissus’ self-enamored unwitting, but without a sense of identity that distinguishes himself from others, it can hardly have been expected of him that he should have had the capacity for compassion for Echo or the

¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. William S. Anderson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996) 98, l. 405.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Wolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955) 70, l. 405. Quotes in Latin followed by English translations are cited with a single reference indicating page number from these two references. Brackets indicate words that have been changed to reflect a more literal translation.

others who loved him; for compassion requires the ability to enter into feelings one doesn't share (or reciprocate), and thus depends in the first place upon a sense of self as distinct from others. Without a firm "sense of self," Narcissus' "hardness" can only have been choosiness that is finally overcome by love for another—once he has finally found an "equal"—and this is hardly justification for his hard fate. In spite of the overtly negative light cast upon Narcissus, innocence on some level plays a central role in the narration.

But this role is also paradoxical, as is already implicit in the observation that Narcissus has finally found his "equal"—a nonsensical assertion if Narcissus has no prior "sense of self." Though essential to the dramatic tension of the story, there is a profound irony inherent in Narcissus' "innocence," into which a closer look at Ovid's language in his initial description of Narcissus allows us a deeper look:

multi illum iuvenes, multae cupiere puellae;
sed (fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma)
nulli illum iuvenes, nullae tetigere puellae.

...and boys and girls
Both sought his love, but in that [tender] stripling
Was pride so fierce no boy, no girl, could touch him. (Ovid 97& 68, ll. 353-55)

Narcissus' "hard pride" ("dura superbia") implies that his hardness of heart does bear something more like a sense of relation to others: a sense of superiority towards them. At the same time, within his "tender form" ("tenera...forma") which encloses it in the phrase, his "hard pride" foreshadows the fact that a "tender" vulnerability of his own will be subjected to the same hardness within him as have those in the mirrored lines preceding and following this one, which tell of the boys and girls who desired him but could not touch him: "multi illum iuvenes, multae cupiere puellae; /.../ nulli illum

iuvenes, nullae tetigere puellae.” As has been mentioned before, even before he falls into unwitting enamorment with himself, there have already been inklings of this proclivity for self-fascination and infatuation, and the disposition to choose these above love of another, in his encounter with Echo. As she, unseen, echoes his own words back to him, he becomes more anxious to see her, and his cries become more and more lively:

“‘veni!.../ quid...me fugis? /...huc coeamus,’” (“‘come!.../Why do you [flee] me?/...Let us [come] together’”) (Ovid 97&69, ll. 382-86). It is only when she reveals herself to him that he heartlessly rejects her—thus making her into the retreating and vanishing being that he reproaches her for being while she keeps herself from his sight.

Interestingly, her invisibility in this passage has the same effect as the water in which he is to view himself; that is, it seems to promise to his self-directed desire something that reality cannot deliver. In the case of Echo, she is not himself; in the case of his image, he cannot have what he sees. And here lies perhaps the essence and tragedy of his despairing passion: the paradox that his image is the be-all and end-all of his desires, something more wonderful than reality, and at the same time nothingness: that it must be one to be the other. While an element of innocence lends an essential dramatic poignancy to the story, that poignancy loses all depth when that innocence is viewed as pure, straightforward and without irony, his cruelty as entirely without understanding, his ignorance of himself without a certain knowing choice.

Andreoli, in his analysis of Ovid’s narrative, speaks of a “split” that occurs (or rather, is “internalized”) at the moment Narcissus realizes the image he sees is his own. Before this moment, according to Andreoli,

Narcissus is fully Narcissus; the reflection that he sees is, to him someone other than himself, independent of him; only the narrator and the reader

know that these two are one. There is a split here, but it has not yet been internalized, separating the one in whom it occurs from himself. Nevertheless, without being fully aware of it, Narcissus is already objectified and alienated, but only into his own image.¹²

This “split” Andreoli defines as a division “between essence and appearances, self and self-awareness” (Andreoli 21). On one hand, from Narcissus’ point of view, this split is first “internalized” in the realization, born of his self-recognition, that he can never possess what he sees as he might possess another. On the other hand, paradoxically it is also the opposite (or the reverse image) of a “split,” for in his self-recognition a split between himself and his image is also mended, unified into a sense of identity (“let us come together,” we recall he cried to Echo when she had echoed his own words back to him).

Spaas has observed, in all this reflection and illusion, an analogy between Ovid’s story and Lacan’s concept of identity formation: “Lacan talks, as Ovid does, about an illusion, but for the psychoanalyst, the ‘illusion’ is part of an identification process” (Spaas 4). Spaas points out an uncanny parallel between the story and Lacan’s theories of the “self,” according to which the “self” is an illusory construct formed in an experience of “otherness”: the child’s reflection in the mirror. In Lacan’s model of identity, the “self” is born at the same moment a primal sense of wholeness and unity (with the mother, from whom the child formerly does not distinguish itself) is forever lost. As in the Narcissus story, the individual acquires a sense of identity at the moment it becomes divided from itself. This coming to “know [one]self” represents a descent from an original integrity of being, the longing for which the child invests in this “other,”

¹² Max Andreoli, “Narcissus and his Double,” in *Echoes of Narcissus*, ed. Lieve Spaas (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000) 16.

intruder self. From a Lacanian perspective, the story of Narcissus can be considered the quintessential narrative of self-alienation and unfulfilled longing that inevitably follow upon the experience of the self: Narcissus' fate is the fate of us all.

But if this were a satisfactory interpretation of Ovid's tale, there would be no need for Echo, nor, in fact, for any characterization of Narcissus; any potential "self" would do. On the contrary, Echo is essential to the story, as is Narcissus' heartlessness towards her, without which the story remains on the level of the tales of "outraged innocence"¹³ in the *Metamorphoses* which it resembles, but from which it differs importantly. It is likewise important that it is not Echo but another, otherwise unknown character, who calls down Narcissus' fate upon him, for otherwise it would be a more or less straightforward tale of retribution. Both kinds of tales occur in the *Metamorphoses*; but the story of Narcissus is characterized by greater symmetry and deeper irony, for it is held in exquisite tension by the interplay of innocence and culpability mentioned earlier. Viewing the tale as a mere metaphor for the longing inevitably following from a Lacanian construction of the self robs the story of this essential tension, and thus of one of its most poignant dimensions. It has been pointed out earlier that Narcissus' "dura superbia," closed within his "tenera...forma" (l. 354) and this line itself enclosed within those which tell of the youths and girls who desire but could not touch him—that this elaborately mirrored construction foreshadows Narcissus falling upon the same "hard pride" that others have fallen upon. The overt symmetry of Narcissus' fate, which corresponds to the poetic symmetry of these lines, underscores the irony that he is withheld from himself as he has withheld himself from others. His "hard pride" is

¹³ Leonard Barkan, "Diana and Actaeon: The Myth as Synthesis," English Literary Renaissance 10 (1980): 321.

mirrored in his hard fate; figuratively he has fallen upon it himself. But is there a less figurative, more direct sense in which Narcissus can be said to suffer from his own pride as others have suffered from it: a sense in which he can be said to withhold himself from himself?

In seeking an answer to this question, hints both within the narrative and in secondary literature on the story suggest themselves. A striking one is what Narcissus says as he pleads with his own image, questioning why it hides itself from him: “quid me, puer unice, fallis / quove petitus abis? Certe nec forma nec aetas / est mea quam fugias, et amarunt me quoque nymphae.” (“Why do you tease me so? Where do you go/ When I am reaching for you? I am surely/ Neither so old or ugly as to scare you,/ And nymphs have been in love with me.”) (Ovid 71&99, ll. 454-56). Here Narcissus betrays an understanding that others have suffered on account of him in the same way he now suffers in not being able to possess his beloved. He has understood, while remaining hard to, the suffering he has caused; and thus he inadvertently brings forward an admission of his own cruelty as an argument against the supposed cruelty of his own beloved—just at the moment when he is about to realize it is himself, whom he likewise will never have. Ovid’s narrative places Narcissus in the same position with respect to himself as his previous wooers, and with the same result. On a more interpretive level, he has already chosen to “remain within himself,” rather than letting sympathy with those others draw him out of himself—at the very moment this “remaining within himself” is becoming his inescapable fate.

Another hint is Andreoli’s observation that there is a certain overt discrepancy in the prophecy of Narcissus’ fate, that he would live a long life, ““ si se non noverit”” (“if

he never knows himself”) (Ovid 97, l. 348). Andreoli argues, “such an oracle seems non-sensical; however, like all oracles, its difficulty lies in an excess, rather than a lack of meaning....Narcissus comes to see and desire himself, but to say that he ‘knows’ himself is an abuse of vocabulary” (Andreoli 15). This observation is followed by a somewhat elaborate argument that Narcissus, in order not to succumb to the fate of the oracle, must never let himself become divided from himself, between “the subject of ‘knows’ (noverit) and the reflexive ‘himself’ (se)” by becoming an object to anybody—which is why he must resist the pursuits of all those enamored with him. He “must remain a pure subject” (15). That Narcissus should have made such a minutely grammatical and arcane analysis of the oracle in order to prevent its coming to pass seems a doubtful interpretation. On one level, the oracle is to be taken more literally than Andreoli is understanding it: Narcissus’ misfortune lies in coming to “know” his own appearance; nevertheless Andreoli does seem to have pinpointed a certain deep irony: that in spite of the oracle, in a fundamental sense, Narcissus’ fate does not lie in having come to “know himself.” The opposite seems more true: that Narcissus is enamored with a vision of beauty that is entirely superficial and illusory. If this is what it means to “know oneself,” then the self must be an illusion as well, and coming to “know oneself” an experience of “self-estrangement”—as Lacan held it to be. In that case, Narcissus’ oracle is in a sense true of all of us: all who come to “know ourselves” must, like Narcissus, cling amorously to a false image or lose ourselves entirely, for a truer sense of coming to “know oneself” does not exist.

But a larger sense in which Narcissus comes to “know himself” that is, I believe, more in keeping with the spirit of Ovid’s narration, lies in the larger principle of justice

operating. His fate was brought upon him by Nemesis for his cruelty, which he would have needed to “look beyond himself”—that is, beyond the superficial, illusory self to a truer self-recognition—to see. This recognition is forced upon Narcissus mainly from our perspective, for literally he is doomed never to “look beyond himself,” and self-knowledge beyond the superficial beauty that enchanted him so hopelessly is forever withheld. Nevertheless, even if it does not quite constitute self-knowledge, Narcissus comes to “know himself” in being dealt the same treatment that he dealt others—a fact of which the inadvertent admissions of his own cruelty betray a dim recognition.

Here we have happened upon another essential “split” present in the narration: the split between Narcissus’ perspective and ours. If Narcissus’ inkling of insight into himself and the justice of his fate does not constitute “self-knowledge,” it all the more points to Narcissus’ “real self” as distinct from the superficial, illusory “self” that fascinates him—a “real self” at least in the sense of who he “really” is from the narrative perspective. The image he sees is one of transcendent beauty and perfection: “spectat humi positus geminum, sua lumina, sidus/ et dignos Baccho, dignos et Apolline crines/ inpubesque genas et eburnean colla...,” (“Lying prone/ He sees his eyes, twin stars, and locks as comely/ As those of Bacchus or the god Apollo/ Smooth cheeks, and ivory neck...”) (98&70, ll. 420-22). Nor is there any sign of the harsh and unfeeling pride with which he has made others acquainted: “spem mihi nescio quam vultu promittis amico,/ cumque ego porrexī tibi brachia, porrigis ultro; cum risi, adrides; lacrimas quoque saepe notavi/ me lacrimante tuas; nutu quoque signa remittis...,” (“You promise,/ I think, some hope with a look of more than friendship./ You reach out arms when I do, and your smile/ Follows my smiling; I have seen your tears/ When I was tearful; you nod and beckon

when I do;) (99&71, ll. 457-60). The mirror imagery in this passage is particularly fascinating in several regards, not the least of which are the various ways the bewitching image is both himself and not himself: an image that looks like him but tragically is not him; one that can be in perfect sympathy (and symmetry) for the paradoxical reason that it does not share his will, for it has no will of its own; one that shows none of the hardness and cruelty—indeed contains none, for it has no content—that in “reality” his loveliness concealed. In Narcissus’ own words, the tragic irony of his passion is that he and his beloved cannot be separated: “o utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!/
votum in amante novum: vellem, quod amamus, abesset!” (“if I could only—/ How curious a prayer from any lover—/ Be parted from my love!”) (99-100&72, ll. 467-68). The deeper irony is that this wish depends on its never being fulfilled, for he is the same Narcissus who does not venture outside himself to feel for anyone else. He is not drawn to his own image as one is drawn to an actual other—any more than this was the case when he was drawn to Echo. Nor is it really himself, but a self-reflecting ideal that has smitten him; and only as long as his beloved remained unattainable—hidden away in the reality of himself that he didn’t know and would never know, a reality unreflected in the perfect image he beheld—could his reflected self remain ideal: a beautiful facade without the hard reality that soon disillusioned his other admirers. In the end, the profoundest “split” in the story of Narcissus is that between the reality and this more flattering ideal: Narcissus’ “ideal self” and who he really is.

The idealization in Narcissus’ self-vision is prefigured in the descriptions of the medium: the pool in which he beholds himself, whose foreboding pristineness is described in mirroring language and other detail that invites notice:

Fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis,
 Quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae
 Contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris
 Nec fer turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus;

There was a pool, silver with shining water,
 To which no shepherds came, no goats, no cattle,
 Whose glass no bird, no beast, no falling [branch]
 Had ever troubled. (98&70, ll. 407-410)

This elaborate description of the pool establishes it as the ideal medium for Narcissus to view himself vividly; but the descriptions are certainly superfluous if that is their only purpose. The pool is not merely “clear” but “silver with shining waters”; it is not only smooth and undisturbed at the opportune time, but “no beast or bird” (“nulla volucris/ nec fer”) has ever stirred (“turbarat”, literally “fouled”) it. The specific creatures from which the pool has been kept unspoiled are lowly ones: domestic animals and those who keep them. It is untouched as Narcissus is. In fact the pool is the inanimate counterpart of Narcissus: pure, virginal, unsullied, but also untouched by any realities, somehow magically set apart from the real world: the ideal medium for an idealized image to be inscribed upon. But even “inscribed” implies a lasting change effected upon it; on this pool reflections only flit like phantoms upon the surface—are wholly incorporeal: “ista repercussae, quam cernis, imaginis umbra est:/ nil habet ista sui: tecum venitque manetque,/ tecum discedet, sit tu discedere possis.” (“[That] vision [which you perceive] is only shadow,/ Only reflection [lit. reflected image], lacking any substance./ It comes with you, it stays with you, it goes/ Away with you, if you can go away”) (Ovid 99&71, ll. 434-36). Once again mirror imagery is built into the poetic language itself, especially in the first line of the above passage, in which “repercussae” and “imaginis” (“reflected...image”) agree with each other, enclosed within “ista” and “umbra”

(“that...shadow”) that are grammatically linked, mediated by perception (“quam cernis,” “which you perceive”). Mirror imagery and virginal unreality are joined in the narcissistic subject.

To appreciate what Ovid is doing with the tale of Narcissus, it is necessary to do what Narcissus never does, but which the story beckons us to do through him: to look below the surface and see the thematic symmetry corresponding to the visual. For as with Narcissus himself, appearances are deceiving. Most other tales of unfortunate mortals in the *Metamorphoses* involve an asymmetry between the character and his or her fate. Even when all the characters are not as innocent as Io—even when, within the mythological framework at least, characters such as Pentheus or Niobe seem to invite their own fate—the punishment is nevertheless externally imposed, and there is no necessary sense of its proportion to the crime. Because this is overtly the case with Narcissus, there is something sweetly sad and stirring in his fate that wins our sympathy; for who cannot sympathize with unrequited love, especially of one so beautiful? The fact that the two are the same might jar slightly; but this was unwitting and an understandable error on Narcissus’ part. The spell is only really broken by the recollection of his cruelty, especially towards Echo. She represents the decisive “asymmetry” in the story, for she is the real “other,” who, the story seems to say, might have drawn him out of himself and the symmetry of inwardness:¹⁴ her love might have humanized Narcissus. He chooses instead a “false other”: an “idealized self,” a perfect reflection of his loveliness and the annulment of that in himself which is the antithesis of love: his unfeeling pride and

¹⁴ By “symmetry of inwardness” is meant a perceived symmetry between the inner and outer worlds created by the projection of the idealized self-image outwardly—essentially creating a world of the idealized self-image—and disregarding or rejecting that which interferes with the illusion.

cruelty. Nevertheless the encounter with this idealized self is in one sense an encounter with Narcissus' "real self"—or at least with reality—for it is equally cruel in withholding from him what he desires; and were it to deliver what he desired, it would no longer be what he desired. It is the perfect symmetrical conundrum; for emptiness cannot satisfy desire, and substance is what the idealized self cannot support.

Spaas seems to have made a key insight when he speaks of water imagery in the tale acting "as a mirror opening onto the depths of oneself, a self that tends to become idealized" (Spaas 2). I would differ in one important point, that the idealized self in the story has no depths—if anything, it is rather a flight from them; in fact, its lack of all depth and substance is its most salient characteristic: "*crudele, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?/ quod petis, est nusquam;*" ("Why try to catch an always fleeing image,/ Poor credulous youngster? What you seek is nowhere") (Ovid 99&70, ll. 432-33).

CHAPTER III

MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

Before proceeding to a discussion of the Narcissus theme in *Frankenstein*, it might be useful to sum up a few salient points in the analysis of Ovid's story that will be of particular significance in examining the presence of the theme in Shelley's novel. First and perhaps foremost is the idealization of the narcissistic "self". It is not really the self with which the narcissistic figure is enamored, but an image of the self that is in some important way an improvement on the original—in part at least (in Narcissus' case perhaps wholly) because it lacks that which is essentially unlovable in the original. In this it is a *flight from the reality of the "self"* that one desires, from the truth of who one really is; and this creates, especially in the case of fictional characters in which this self-idealization is thematized, a disconnect between a character's self-image and how we view them. Thus narcissism is a paradox of self-"knowledge" and self-deception—a paradox beautifully thematized in Ovid's story. Such self-idealization creates an image that is both more wondrous than what reality can fulfill, and something essentially without content: a "shadow," a "fleeing image." Second is the split in the "self" engendered by idealized self-enamoration. That the object of one's desire is idealized might not distinguish it from any other infatuation; but because the object of narcissistic desire is "oneself," such desire creates an insurmountable gap between the image and the reality of who one is. But the divergence is felt only in the unfulfillment; for from the

narcissist's point of view, there might be no reason to believe that this idealized self could not be real, or the desire for it not realizable "in an ideal world." There is a symmetry of inwardness¹⁵ in narcissistic desire, such as we saw in Ovid's story, that depends on the "false other" that one has become to oneself; a real "other" has no place in it and is only a disruption to the pleasing symmetry. This leads to the final salient point in the foregoing analysis of Ovid's story: an inability to feel for the "real other," reflected in the scorn and cruelty Narcissus shows towards Echo at the moment she ceases to reflect himself and shows herself to be an "other"—the proper object of feeling whom he denies it, to lavish it upon a "shadow...lacking any substance." For Narcissus, the symmetry of desire becomes the symmetry of fate, whereby he is dealt the same unfeeling denial of himself, likewise at his own hands.

The appearance of the Narcissus myth in Shelley's novel, as well as Milton's allusion to the myth in *Paradise Lost* which seems to have inspired Shelley's reference, are among the most prominent manifestations of the story in Western literature. Considering the temporal and cultural distance of both of these writers from Ovid, there is an astonishing consistency of treatment with respect to this theme—notwithstanding its metamorphosis of form, particularly in Shelley's novel. Shelley subverts Milton's allusion to the myth, applying the motif of self-enchancement to a tale of self-horror. Her elaborate transformation of the Narcissus theme creates an entirely new being from it, analogous to the creation brought to life by her tragic protagonist; but also like Frankenstein's creature, the humanity in Ovid's tale is still present. Though brief, the overt allusion to the Narcissus myth in *Frankenstein* is unmistakable and resonates

¹⁵ See footnote 14.

deeply in the story, diffusing itself throughout the novel's major themes. It takes place near the middle of the novel, within the narration of Frankenstein's creature. This narration is contained within Frankenstein's own, itself within the narration of Captain Walton's letters to his sister. This elaborate narrative structure bears some comparison to the mirroring lines surrounding Ovid's characterization of Narcissus—a comparison that is more interesting for the fact that the monster's story is framed by two essentially narcissistic points of view. Both Frankenstein and Walton have been driven by the desire for glory which they have been willing to pursue at any cost, even having proven capable of sacrificing others to realize their ambitions.

In his self-narration, Frankenstein's creature tells of the life he has led from the time of his creation and abandonment by his horrified creator up to his interview with Frankenstein, during which he has been forced to wander alone in the world without shelter or human companionship. He seeks both from the De Lacey family, hiding himself in a hut next to their cottage in the woods from which he observes them and learns the use of language, eventually making a disastrous attempt to form a relationship with them. It is here that he first catches a glimpse of his own image:

I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity.¹⁶

Though the monster's terror and despair upon seeing his image “in a transparent pool” clearly seems Shelley's own twist on Narcissus' tragic tale, surprisingly few critics

¹⁶ Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000) 104.

have noted the allusion. One of the few who has, Terry Thompson, discusses the “subtle and quite poignant parallels” between Narcissus and Frankenstein’s monster, pointing out that both are doomed by their appearance: The monster “will never be able to escape the power of his ugliness, just as Narcissus could never escape the power of his beauty.”¹⁷ Thompson observes that this subtle allusion to the “enduring power of the Narcissus myth...turns the myth on its head” (Thompson 21), but he stops short of pursuing the implications of the myth or this treatment of it in the story. Still fewer critics have noted that this moment in the story is not simply an allusion to the Narcissus myth, but more directly an allusion to Eve in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*—a work that looms large in the novel, which contains a number of elaborate allusions to and parallels with the epic poem. Like Frankenstein’s creature, Eve tells of her own creation and wanderings in Paradise where, like Narcissus, she happens upon a pool and is charmed by her own reflection: “As I bent down to look, just opposite / A shape within the wat’ry gleam appeared / Bended to look on me: I started back, / it started back, but pleased I soon returned, / Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks / Of sympathy and love;....”¹⁸ It is particularly noteworthy that the creature uses Eve’s precise wording to describe his reaction to his own image: “I started back.” This signals a deliberate parallel; and yet the difference is as important as the similarity: Eve “starts” in wonder, Frankenstein’s creature in terror. Eve’s emotion upon her self-discovery is similar to

¹⁷ Terry W. Thompson, “Shelley’s Frankenstein,” *Explicator* 58.1 (1999): 23.

¹⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Douglas Bush (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), Bk. IV, ll. 460-65.

Narcissus', the creature's is the opposite of both; his self-horror at his own reflection is a subversion of both allusions.

A wider presence in the novel of similarly subverted allusions to *Paradise Lost* has led several critics to interpret the novel itself as a subversion of Milton's work. In her feminist reading of the novel, Sandra Gilbert, one of the few critics to note specifically Shelley's allusion to Eve, interprets it as "a corrective to Milton's blindness about Eve: Having been created second, inferior, a mere rib, how could she possibly, this passage implies, have seemed anything but monstrous to herself?"¹⁹ Earlier in her article Gilbert has asserted—in fact, her argument largely rests upon the premise—that the absence of allusion to Eve in the novel stands in stark contrast to parallels with the other main figures in *Paradise Lost*, and actually signifies Eve's presence in *all* the parts (Gilbert 57): a position that is somewhat contradicted by her own observation of a clear parallel between the monster and Eve. Before proceeding to the next critic who has commented upon allusion to *Paradise Lost* in the novel, it would be useful to examine the allusion to Eve and Gilbert's conclusions about it more closely.

The parody of Eve's innocent self-desire in the monster's self-horror has further resonance in Frankenstein's own reaction to his creation, which parallels the monster's reaction to himself: like his creation, he also recoils in horror. Relating to Walton the story of his project of "infusing life into an inanimate body," Frankenstein tells him:

For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream had vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room.... (Shelley 61)

¹⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert, "Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve," *Feminist Studies* 4.2 (1978): 65.

As for his creation upon seeing himself, in the passage discussed earlier, Frankenstein's revulsion in this passage is also self-horror. It is bound up with the disappointment of the ambitions he had invested in his endeavors and the renown they would bring him, as he relates earlier: "Soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein,—more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (53). When this ambition deadens him to all other aspirations and pleasures, reverence for life and death, the beauties of nature and desire for intercourse with others, it is this deathliness he beholds with horror in the dead creature he has brought to life; and he sees in him the guilt of his own ambitions and his arrogance in having carried them out, referring to the monster as "the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life" (61). At this point in the story, the monster has not become demoniacal; Frankenstein's own narration seems to indicate that the epithet is a more apt description of himself and what his mad drives had made him than of his creature: "Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?...a resistless, and almost frantic, impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (58). Thus begins a pattern that continues throughout the rest of the novel: Frankenstein attributes a demonic nature to his creature because he sees in him his own guilt: both the acknowledged guilt of having created him, and the unacknowledged guilt of having abandoned him (which does, in a sense, turn his creature into the demon Frankenstein portrays him to be). In short, Frankenstein sees in his creature a reflection of himself. Before he realizes his

ambitions, this reflection is idealized. It embodies what Frankenstein aspires to be: the sublime scientific mind whose achievements surpass all others before him. From the moment he brings his creation to life, the image is a shattered one (though still idealized, as we shall later see). Thus the creature's self-horror is a pattern of Frankenstein's own, which thus also carries resonances of Eve's innocent self-enchancement—or rather, the subversion of this. Contrary to Gilbert's assertion, Eve's presence in the novel is as prominent as that of the main male figures in *Paradise Lost*—God, Adam and Satan—whose parallels with Frankenstein and his creature are also multiple and complex, and often likewise subverted.

Nevertheless Gilbert's interpretation raises an interesting question: why does Shelley treat the allusion to Eve (and through her, to Narcissus) subversively? Whether or not there is any foundation to Gilbert's claim that *Frankenstein* is a "corrective to Milton's blindness about Eve," such use of allusion could still signal a subversive approach to Milton's work itself—that is, an effort to undermine the poet's creation or the world view it presents, or perhaps the poet's status in the Western literary tradition.

Such a view is put forward in John Lamb's article, "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Milton's Monstrous Myth," in which he argues that Shelley's design for her novel was to topple that great monolith of literary influence, *Paradise Lost*, which held the British literary tradition firmly in its grip in the nineteenth century.²⁰ He focuses on the monster's "fall," arguing that although it invites comparisons to the fall of Satan from Heaven and to Adam and Eve's fall from grace, it can only be meaningfully understood as a "fall" into language and culture. According to this argument, the monster, whose

²⁰ John B. Lamb, "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Milton's Monstrous Myth," *Nineteenth Century Literature* 47.3 (1992): 303-19.

reading of *Paradise Lost* figures importantly in his own story, absorbs a world-view informed by that work, in which the individual is an autonomous entity, “By nature free, not over-rul’d by Fate / Inextricable, or strict necessity” (Milton Bk. V, ll. 527-28). Lamb calls this the “bourgeois ideal of the individual,” claiming it had become firmly entrenched by the nineteenth century, to the exclusion of all other conceptualizations of the self (Lamb 305).

According to Lamb, the monster’s enculturation especially through Milton also deceives him into a false belief in language and its efficacy in accomplishing his purposes. When language inevitably fails him, the monster assumes the predetermined cultural identity set up for him by Milton’s monolithic work. So deep is the monster’s identification with the system of identities engendered through “Milton’s myth of identity” that he must kill to defend it; his murders are “necessary acts of self-preservation,” and symbolize “the way in which hegemonic systems preserve themselves through the destruction of alternate systems of meaning and value” (316).

Interpretations such as Gilbert’s and Lamb’s, which posit a fundamentally critical attitude towards Milton in Shelley’s novel, do not seem consistent with Shelley’s praise of Milton in her preface to her novel, where she expresses rather the desire to emulate than to undermine Milton:

I have thus endeavored to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature, while I have not scrupled to innovate upon their combinations. The *Iliad*, the tragic poetry of Greece—Shakespeare, in *The Tempest* and *Midsummer Night’s Dream*,—and most especially Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, conform to this rule....(Shelley 26)

There does not seem to be anything ironic in this praise; if there were, the same irony must also apply to several other of the most renowned poets of the Western tradition.

Such sweeping ironic intent seems implausible, and at the very least would require more evidence to establish than Shelley gives us here. If it is not meant ironically, it is difficult to understand why Shelley would take an undermining approach to an author whom she has expressed a clear desire to emulate in such an important respect. The passage gives us reason to suppose that Shelley means to communicate something different in her transformation of Eve and Narcissus through Frankenstein's monster and Frankenstein himself. Since we know nothing more directly about Shelley's attitudes toward Milton or her literary purposes than what she has indicated here, we can only examine and compare the parallel passages in as far as Milton's narration seems relevant to an interpretation of Shelley's.

Perhaps it is most crucial to examine the circumstances (those within the works themselves) surrounding the narrations being compared: in particular what has led up to them, since this may account for the similarities and differences between them. Both narrations are being told to someone: Eve's to Adam, the monster's to Frankenstein. This is not a precise parallel, since Frankenstein is the monster's creator, whereas Adam is Eve's mate; if Eve's narration were directed towards her creator, it would need to be addressed to God. The difference is more significant than an exact parallel would be, given the larger circumstances that the monster has no mate, and this is precisely the motive of the monster's narrative: to demand that Frankenstein create one for him. "You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede" (Shelley 128). This is a parody of the Genesis story of creation, in which God creates woman as a companion for man: "Then the Lord God

said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’”²¹ This story is not specifically told in *Paradise Lost*, which begins its narration after the creation of Adam and Eve, nor is it specifically related in the words of its characters; but it is foundational in the story upon which *Paradise Lost* is based. We know from Frankenstein’s own account that his creature’s needs played a role neither in his creation nor in Frankenstein’s response to his creature. The monster’s murderous nature results from this neglect and his ensuing misery and isolation. Throughout the novel Frankenstein seems insensible to the guilt he has incurred toward the monster in having made him miserable; and in the wake of the monster’s murders, both before the monster’s demand for a companion and in revenge for Frankenstein’s refusal, Frankenstein expresses wracking guilt and remorse over having brought a “demon” into the world, but never for having made him that way.

The monster’s demand for the basic necessity of companionship, and the thematic subversion of the biblical creator-creature relationship it represents, underscores Frankenstein’s fundamental failure as a creator. Frankenstein acknowledges a sense of responsibility towards his creature only a single time in the novel, on his deathbed; but it is mentioned only incidentally, more by way of justifying his decision not to create a mate for his creature and his desire to destroy him, than as an acknowledgement of his failure towards him, which he never truly admits:

...I feel justified in desiring the death of my adversary. During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blamable. In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still

²¹ Genesis 2:18.

paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention....(184)

From the perspective of action, Frankenstein's reasoning makes a certain sense at this point in the story, for the monster has murdered innocent people, and it is reasonable that Frankenstein should perceive the need to destroy the bane he created. What Frankenstein is not acknowledging is that the monster's murders were committed out of revenge on himself; it does not enter into his considerations that, upon his own death, the monster's motives for murder might be extinguished as well. But in any case, falling short of assuming responsibility for his failings towards his creature, in the only instance of acknowledging responsibility towards him at all, recalls Frankenstein's self-centered motives in creating him—"...more, far more, will I achieve: I will...unfold the deepest mysteries of creation" (53)—and suggests an explanation for his insensibility towards him. Frankenstein's ambitions for glory having been directed towards the world; in their disappointment he is blind to his failure towards the initial (and for a considerable time the only) victim of it: his creation. His failed ambitions continue to direct the vision of his failure, narcissistically magnifying some aspects of it and blinding him to others. To draw an analogy with the myth of Narcissus, in equating his creature with his ambitions—as Narcissus equated Echo's voice with his own words—Frankenstein could have no feeling for him when those ambitions were disappointed—as Narcissus in his disappointment could also show no feeling for Echo. Like Echo, Frankenstein's creature is a "real" other who becomes the "non-other" in the narcissistic equation. Unfortunately for Frankenstein and the monster's other victims—unlike Echo who pines away, diminishes and finally vanishes upon being scorned by Narcissus—the monster refuses to go away.

It is a fascinating aspect of the novel that the monster knows best how to punish Frankenstein because of the misery he has endured himself. He does not inflict violence upon his creator himself, but upon those whom he loves, thus inflicting the same desolation upon Frankenstein that he has suffered himself. Still Frankenstein's demonization and revilement of his creature, as well as his determination to destroy him, are not a real acknowledgement of him as a being in his own right. For Frankenstein, his creature remains always only the demonic creation he brought into the world, for which he can only atone through its destruction. One of the most artful accomplishments of the novel is that the author creates a full-fledged character in the monster, but withholds that full characterization in Frankenstein's view of him—even while nearly all of the monster's own words and story are contained within Frankenstein's own. Rosencrantz- and Guildenstern-like, Frankenstein conveys a message of which he remains incognizant, and likewise to his own detriment.

If the monster is the “real other” of the story, it is also true that, as in the story of Narcissus, the real other has been traded in for a false one—the idealized image. On first blush, what seems to distinguish Frankenstein's story from the story of Narcissus is that Frankenstein is not only disappointed in his desires, but also disillusioned. Narcissus pines away for a “self” that he still believes to exist but that he may not have; but Frankenstein must face the cold hard truth of his false ambitions and his failure, and endure the punishment for them. But it is actually among the most well-wrought ironies of the novel that for all of Frankenstein's torment and crushing disillusionment, which he expresses in the most sublime terms, it is not essentially his illusion that has been shattered; or at least, inasmuch as it is a shattered ideal that he laments, the shards are not

swept away and replaced by something more truthful. In some sense, the self-idealization that has driven him remains intact, only now the ideal is split between unrealized dream and hellish outcome. This is suggested in the still vaunting tone of Frankenstein's words as he speaks of his own downfall to Walton: "I was imbued with high hopes and a lofty ambition; but how am I sunk! Oh! My friend, if you had known me as I once was, you would not recognize me in this state of degradation...a high destiny seemed to bear me on, until I fell, never, never again to rise" (180). The sort of grandiose self-characterization of these words suggests that Frankenstein views his ruin from much the same perspective as that of his earlier ambitions: with a sort of posturing self-awareness, now of a fallen hero. He feels the greatness of his own fall, as he earlier saw the greatness of his potential, from the same heroic perspective. Even as he warns Walton to "seek happiness in tranquility and avoid ambition" (185), Frankenstein seems himself never to have wholly abandoned the heroic ethic.

In this regard he is similar to that greatest of narcissists in *Paradise Lost*, Satan, who also speaks of his own downfall in grandiose terms:

"Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"
Said then the lost Archangel, "this the seat
That we must change for heav'n, this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so,...

"...Farewell, happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells! Hail, horrors, hail,
Infernal World, and thou, profoundest hell,
Receive thy new possessor:..." (Milton Bk. I, ll. 242-52)

Resonances of Milton's Satan are felt in Frankenstein's words throughout the novel, in the narrations of his ambitions and of his downfall. In the same speech quoted above, Frankenstein compares himself to the archfiend: "All my speculations and hopes are as

nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell” (Shelley 180). Frankenstein’s self-comparison with Satan echoes the monster’s own earlier in the novel: “Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him...the bitter gall of envy rose within me...I, like the arch-fiend bore a hell within me...” (117, 122). Of the parallel between Frankenstein’s creature and Milton’s Satan more will be said later; for present purposes it suffices to observe that in the monster’s words the self-comparison does not have the same self-dramatizing effect as in his maker’s. This is not to suggest that such utterances of Frankenstein’s are not meant to convey genuine and intense suffering, which they certainly are; but they also point to a certain self-conscious element, which along with other elements suggest a basically narcissistic orientation. As often seems to be the case with narcissistic self-awareness, it draws in his audience as well, as Walton’s reaction to him suggests: “What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity, when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin!” (179) Walton, in his captivation with Frankenstein, becomes a kind of mirror for Frankenstein’s self-image.

In the transition from ambition to ruin, Frankenstein has not achieved some sort of tragic enlightenment, but rather has traded one delusion for another, though both are of the same source. Neither delusion is complete infatuation: on the fictional terms the novel presents us, Frankenstein is right in supposing he was capable of a breakthrough no other had accomplished; and in his downfall, he realizes too well the terrible work he has accomplished and the excesses that drove him to it. But in both he is blind to himself, as was Narcissus both in his proud scornfulness and in his self-pining. Thematically this split between dream and disillusionment in Frankenstein is analogous to Narcissus’ desire

and unfulfillment: in the perfect world, Narcissus could possess his love, and Frankenstein could have had with impunity the success and glory due a great scientist. But the real split lies elsewhere, in the division separating the idealized self from the real self that, in the case of both Narcissus and Frankenstein, demonstrates an unfeeling disregard for others. This is true of Frankenstein both before and after his fall. His ambitions couch themselves in terms of the welfare of humankind—“unfold[ing] to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” (53)—when they are really directed toward self-aggrandizement; and in his pursuit of the monster, whom he now believes he must destroy for the protection of humanity—“my duties towards the beings of my own species” (184)—he is willing to sacrifice Walton and the entire ship’s crew to his purpose. To this end he addresses the crew in vainglorious rhetoric which, as like thinking has done to himself, alternately inspires and plunges them into despair, as Walton relates in his letters to his sister:

Even the sailors feel the power of his eloquence: when he speaks, they no longer despair; he rouses their energies, and, while they hear his voice, they believe these vast mountains of ice are mole-hills, which will vanish before the resolutions of man. These feelings are transitory; each day of expectation delayed fills them with fear, and I almost dread a mutiny caused by this despair. (181)

As is also typical of narcissistic personalities, Frankenstein draws others into his purposes, makes them an extension of his. Shelley almost comically inflates the heroic rhetoric Frankenstein employs to manipulate Walton’s crew:

Oh! be men, or be more than men. Be steady to your purposes, and firm as a rock. This ice is not made of such stuff as your hearts may be; it is mutable, and cannot withstand you, if you say that it shall not. Do not return to your families with the stigma of disgrace marked on your brows. Return as heroes who have fought and conquered, and who know not what it is to turn their backs on the foe. (183)

Such passages as these are another thematic link with Milton's Satan; they recall the archdemon's address to the legions of hell as he likewise goads them to futile valor in the service of his own despairing purpose:

For who can yet believe, though after loss,
That all these puissant legions, whose exile
Hath emptied heav'n, shall fail to re-ascend
Self-raised, and repossess their native seat?...
For this infernal pit shall never hold
Celestial Spirits in bondage,.../...Peace is despaired,
For who can think submission? War then, war
Open or understood must be resolved. (Milton I, ll. 631-34, 657-62)

In calling attention to these overtones of Milton's antihero in her discussion of Miltonic allusion in *Frankenstein*, Leslie Tannenbaum points out the irony that although Frankenstein warns Walton of the crafty eloquence of the monster that he must guard against (Shelley 178), it is actually he who uses eloquence selfishly and deceitfully in trying to persuade the sailors on Walton's ship not to turn back.²² This observation lends support to the argument that in his hopeless crusade against the monster, Frankenstein is still driven by an inflated sense of self that, in the failure of the earlier designs in which he had invested it, he idealizes at the expense of his alter-ego, heaping his own failings on his creature and enemy.

Parallels between the monster and Satan have been mentioned earlier, and are also very pronounced in the novel. Having learned to read by happening upon a copy of (conspicuously) *Paradise Lost*, the monster identifies with both Adam and Satan, as he says in addressing his creator Frankenstein: "Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no

²² Leslie Tannenbaum, "From Filthy Type to Truth: Miltonic Myth in *Frankenstein*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* (1977): 105.

misdeed” (93-94). The sense of his outcast state is more powerful than his wonder at his own creation, and it is Satan with whom he most closely identifies and compares himself: “Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him...the bitter gall of envy rose within me...I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me...” (117,122). The creature’s words to his maker pinpoint the main difference between their identifications with Satan: diagetically, the creature has done nothing to bring his outcast state upon himself; it was brought upon him solely by his maker.

As the monster rightly accuses him, in having turned his back upon him, Frankenstein has cast him out at a point when monster is still innocent of evil; and Frankenstein is also the cause the monster’s ugliness, which has made it impossible for him to find acceptance elsewhere:

Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless and alone. (116)

Ultimately, in driving him to despair, Frankenstein is the author of the monster’s corruption itself—his fall from innocence analogous to Adam and Eve’s fall from grace. This is yet another point in which Frankenstein has failed in his usurped role of creator; for the Creator of *Paradise Lost* made his creatures free to choose, to keep their blessed state or to fall.

...they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I. ...
They trespass, authors to themselves in all,
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formed them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves;... (Milton III, ll. 116-25)

The complex shifting of parallels with Miltonic figures in *Frankenstein* portrays Shelley's tragic hero as a parody of the Miltonic God whose failure as a creator on every level shifts him into the position of Satan, as he has shifted his own creature as well from the role of Adam to that of Satan.

All of this casts further light on the monster's other parallel role discussed earlier, the parallel with Eve in her innocent self-discovery and self-infatuation. The monster himself has pointed out the most important difference between himself and Adam in terms of his relationship to the world in which he finds himself: he is "wretched, helpless and alone." This difference is equally important in the parallel with Eve, in light of what follows upon her self-discovery and self-enamoration in *Paradise Lost*. In her narration of this, Eve continues:

...there I had fixed / Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me: "What thou seest,
What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself,
With thee it came and goes; but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparably thine;"... (Milton IV, ll. 465-73)

A charmingly humorous touch to the story is that Eve is not quite as taken with Adam as with the image she has just left behind, and is about to return to it when Adam beckons her and overcomes her narcissistic longing—a little forcibly, it seems: "With that thy gentle hand/ Seized mine, I yielded,..." (ll. 488-89). There are many fascinating aspects of this narration that could be pursued; what primarily concerns us here is the contrast with the monster's parallel experience of self-discovery. It is not the prelude to the introduction to love for another, but marks the moment when the inevitability of the monster's isolation first dawns upon him, even if he does not yet "entirely know the fatal

effects of this miserable deformity” (Shelley 104). His own image is no consolation for his isolation, as Eve’s own image was a temptation for her; it is self-horror, the consequence of the hideousness with which his creator endowed him—the same flawed workmanship that, in an instant, dashed Frankenstein’s hopes and turned his ambitions to revulsion: “Mingled with this horror, I felt the bitterness of disappointment; dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!” (61) At the moment he brings his creation to life, it is largely Frankenstein’s vanity that is disappointed and offended; for as we have already seen, in the designs of his imagination that inspired his undertaking and fed his obsession, he had seen his own glory and fame reflected. What the monster beholds at a point when he is still innocent of evil is the failure and culpability of his creator. What Eve’s narration seems to suggest is that narcissism, at least the tendency towards it, is something essentially innocent in itself, perhaps even the basis of love of an other and of the proper relationship of oneself to the world—though it may always threaten to supplant these with illusion. The monster is cheated of all of these—of Eve’s pre-lapsarian pleasure of self-discovery, of love and companionship that he must demand for himself, of a relationship with his world—by his creator, of whom Narcissus is a type. His miserable isolation is a negative type of the desolation of narcissistic self-idealization; but his is forced upon him, unlike Frankenstein’s, who chooses it when he fatally crosses that threshold into illusion and sees in his own image something that is not there: a legitimate creator—as Narcissus saw in his own image something it was not: an other who could be adored. And as in that story the real other vanishes but remains, invisible in the woods, rendered as unsubstantial by Narcissus’

cruelty as the object of his passion, so the real other in the novel, whom Frankenstein cheated of all, remains for him nothing but the shadow side of his own disappointed illusions. This he vainly pursues into the icy wasteland in the conviction that destroying him will rectify all. Without the specifically theological implications of Milton's epic, in the elaborate parallels with Satan Shelley portrays the self-inflation and futility of narcissistic self-idealization as something empty and despairing—perhaps ultimately as the spirit's exile into a hopeless wasteland, whether or not this bears any relationship to the hell of Milton's cosmos.

On its most overt level, the presence of the narcissistic theme in *Frankenstein* seems to be a critique of overweening scientific arrogance: the blind pursuit of scientific accomplishment lacking all reverence for nature and ignoring all moral boundaries. One of the things Shelley accomplishes in the elaborate incorporation of Miltonic allusions in the novel is to portray the scientific usurpation of the role traditionally ascribed to God, by human beings blinded by ambition and lacking the foresight and benevolence attributed to God. The presence of Walton in the story, who takes in Frankenstein in the Arctic and whose determination to reach the North Pole parallels Frankenstein's ambitions, extends the critique beyond scientism to a wider range of human endeavor, but the same indictment of hubris applies. Ultimately, through an elaborate reworking of the Narcissus myth, through the allusion to Eve and especially through Frankenstein's relationship to his abortive self-reflection, the author is critiquing something more fundamental about human nature. The Narcissus myth is a "self-reflexive" allusion in the novel, reflecting through the monster to other literary works, back onto his creator and

perhaps back onto us the readers. For the myth reflects something fundamental about its tragic protagonist, and through him about tragic humanity.

In this way Shelley incorporates a philosophical or spiritual, even a kind of religious perspective into her novel: a sense of the proper relationship to others, to nature and the world, and the (potentially catastrophic) consequences that follow when that sense of proper relationship is violated. Because Shelley uses the subversion of traditional religious themes to portray that violation, her novel has been interpreted as the subversion of the religious themes themselves. We have already encountered a few such interpretations, in Gilbert's and Lamb's analyses of parallels with *Paradise Lost*. Soyka gives another such view, though more general, in his assertion that Victor Frankenstein is emblematic of the thoughtless Creator who has abandoned his creation and has himself laid the groundwork for human wickedness. Soyka interprets Shelley's novel as an indictment of careless divinity, concluding that if redemption is possible, it must come through mankind, and not through God.²³

Although this is one possible interpretation, the present study posits a less fundamentally subversive treatment of religious themes in the novel. Shelley's subversive treatment of Milton contains a critique of her own age: the portrayal of a world in which a loss of the faith that had directed the sense of the ultimate towards an ultimate "Other"—and through that Other to others—has left a void that has been filled with a narcissistic self-image. Through the use of the Narcissus theme to portray a worldview that is essentially narcissistic and blind to itself, Shelley seems to reach

²³ David Soyka, "Frankenstein and the Miltonic Creation of Evil," Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy 33.2 (1992): 167.

through Milton's use of the same theme to something more universal. Most significant for present purposes is the observation that the treatment of this theme, in the various cultural frameworks through which we have so far traced it, has had a certain consistency in terms of its cultural, moral and philosophical implications for humanity. The reversal of this orientation towards the narcissistic thematic in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche will be the primary focus of the final main section of this study.

CHAPTER IV

NIETZSCHE'S *ZUR GENEALOGIE DER MORAL*

A few problems with comparing and contrasting Nietzsche to the earlier literary writers should be acknowledged at the outset. Perhaps the most obvious is the question of genre: whether it is appropriate or even possible to compare the literary treatment of an essentially literary theme with the appearance of the same theme in a philosophical work. A second issue, related to the first though not obviously, is that unlike the literary authors, Nietzsche makes no specific or even apparently conscious allusion to the myth of Narcissus. The first objection might well be valid if we were to make a cross-genre comparison between literary allusion to the Narcissus story and, for example, Freud's application of it. Freud used the terms "narcissism" and "narcissistic" to refer to definite, observed psychological phenomena, which he might have felt to be reflected in the myth of Narcissus; but such technical definition places a boundary around the theme that does not constrain literary allusion. An analysis of narcissism in Freud in the context of this discussion would have to take this limitation into account; but the same is not necessarily true of Nietzsche, who does not incorporate narcissism or the Narcissus theme into his philosophy in any explicit way, and thus does not attach any specific meaning to it that would limit analysis to those terms. It is arguable that Nietzsche does not incorporate the Narcissus theme at all; but I would argue that it is embodied in his philosophy in a way that has striking parallels with its development in the works of the literary authors—in

fact, that it is as profoundly present in his philosophy as it is in Milton's epic or Shelley's novel. Nevertheless, it cannot be discussed in exactly the same way as in those works where the theme is built into the structure of the works themselves (in spite of never being specifically mentioned). Examining the narcissistic theme in Nietzsche's writings is admittedly a bit more like examining it in the characters of those works than the use the authors were making of it. This comparison is the more apt for the fact that the quality of Nietzsche's speech is not altogether different from that of Victor Frankenstein's or of Satan's in *Paradise Lost*, in several of their speeches already quoted for example; and its rhetorical intent and appeal are highly comparable. These similarities would still exist even if Milton's and Shelley's works had never suggested Narcissus explicitly; thus the issue of explicitness of the theme itself should not necessarily be a deterring factor in an analysis such as this—especially as Nietzsche in his own way does thematize narcissism, overtly if not explicitly.

In the case of genre, a consideration in favor of the comparison is the literary quality of Nietzsche's writing. His impassioned, subjective philosophical approach and the rhetorical flourish characteristic of his style contribute to a quality whose persuasive power is distinct from the more usual methodical appeal to reason typical of philosophy, and provides inroads of comparison with literary works. The most significant difference in the presence of the Narcissus theme in Nietzsche's philosophy from its use in the works already discussed lies not in differences of genre or explicitness of allusion, but in orientation towards the theme itself; and as this difference of orientation, on account of its profound influence, has enormous implications for subsequent intellectual, literary and

cultural development, it is an apt subject of comparison for the purposes of this study, even as care must be taken to observe factors problematizing the comparison.

Another issue that ought to be addressed upfront is the question of philosophical voice. Considerable attention has been focused on understanding the voice (or voices) behind Nietzsche's philosophy, especially as this sometimes seems in conflict with what is known about the philosopher himself. This is especially true with regard to Nietzsche's ideas about compassion, which figure importantly in this study for reasons which should be clear from the subsequent analysis. Compassion is almost always presented in a negative light in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in spite of correspondences and accounts of Nietzsche that represent the philosopher himself as compassionate. Michael Frazer, in his analysis of compassion in Nietzsche's philosophy, presents a more complex view of the philosopher's ideas about compassion than is evident in this work alone. However, Frazer's study does not lend much support to the idea that Nietzsche was writing ironically or deceptively in the view he presents of compassion in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*²⁴ and it is also known that Nietzsche considered his own type and degree of

²⁴ Another viewpoint to consider is the possibility that Nietzsche is presenting an alternative to the predominant morality of his age in order to unsettle that morality and show it to be only one ethic among many possibilities. Such an interpretation must assume a high level of irony or role-playing on Nietzsche's part. To whatever extent this might be the case, Nietzsche would then be presenting a voice that is not his own, but is to a high degree fictitious. This would of course be of consequence for the larger understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy but would not substantially change this analysis, where the ultimate perspective behind the work is not as relevant as the point of view being conveyed, and the way in which narcissism is reflected through that point of view. Whatever the ultimate perspective of the work may be—which appears to be not absolutely determinable—this study will mostly limit itself to an analysis of the voice Nietzsche presents; and where it speculates beyond that to larger observations and conclusions, the uncertainty of the philosophical voice is acknowledged. At the very least, Nietzsche's work gives no solid reason to suppose that the narcissism reflected in its manner of expression is being portrayed critically, as is clear in Shelley.

compassion an affliction and weakness that fought against his own philosophical ideals.²⁵ Although the issue of philosophical voice in Nietzsche's work is fraught with complexity, there is a higher degree of immediacy of that voice in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* than, for example, in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, in which it can be taken even less for granted that the voice of Zarathustra is equivalent to Nietzsche's. For this reason and for the sake of simplicity, "Nietzsche" and "the philosophical voice" will be used interchangeably in this study, with the understanding that such an equation of identity is not unproblematic.

Peter Burgard adds another layer of complexity to issue of voice that should also be considered. In his discussion of the feminine in Nietzsche, referring to the philosopher's remarks about women Burgard asserts that "Nietzsche is the philosopher of excess. Everywhere we turn, we are faced with excess both in form and in content."²⁶ Burgard refers to Alexander Nehemas, who has pointed out Nietzsche's "rhetorical excess," claiming that Nietzsche's texts "often say too much" with respect to the content of those texts. Nehemas considers this quality to be an essential aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy: "Nietzsche's writing, and his thinking, is essentially hyperbolic."²⁷ This might be further supported by Nietzsche's own designation of the work as a "eine Streitschrift," ("a polemic"), since hyperbole and otherwise immoderate expression is in the spirit of polemic language. Though undoubtedly an important consideration to keep in mind in understanding Nietzsche's philosophy, it is somewhat problematic in terms of

²⁵ Michael L. Frazer, "The Compassion of Zarathustra: Nietzsche on Sympathy and Strength." *The Review of Politics* 68.1 (2006): 76-77.

²⁶ Peter J. Burgard, "Introduction: Figures of Excess" *Nietzsche and the Feminine*, ed. Peter Burgard (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1994) 12.

²⁷ Alexandar Nehemas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) 31. Quoted by Burgard, 13.

critiquing any of the philosopher's statements, for anything can potentially be regarded as excessive or hyperbolic. Presumably excess and hyperbole imply some lesser expression being conveyed; and as the philosopher has given no guide by which to determine this, he consequently cannot be considered responsible for having said anything. In any case it is not primarily the extremity of Nietzsche's statements that is being examined here (though this is also sometimes significant) but the quality of what he is saying; usually paring down Nietzsche's expressions to whatever one might consider a correct interpretation for them (within reason) would not severely affect this analysis.

What makes the difference of orientation between Mary Shelley and Nietzsche perhaps the most striking is their historical proximity. Within less than a century of each other, Shelley's and Nietzsche's approaches to the subject of narcissism are arguably more distant than the nearly two millennia separating Shelley and Ovid—and most certainly than the nearly two centuries between Shelley and Milton. The objection might be raised that there is nothing monolithic about literary themes: any writer or artist of any kind or in any century might have taken any approach they liked to the theme. This may be true, but the differences examined in this study are both intimately linked with cultural and historical developments—some already reflected in Shelley's novel—and something new in literary and intellectual history; in part they are Nietzsche's peculiar innovation, and perhaps one of his lasting contributions.

In part, Shelley and Nietzsche are both responding to the growing secularization of European society, to the ensuing cultural, scientific and intellectual changes and the existential angst left in its wake. It has sometimes been said that *Frankenstein* represents a world from which God has vanished (Soyka 167); less than a century later Nietzsche

declares God to be dead.²⁸ It could be said that as the immanence of God retreats with this increasing secularization, in the face of the expanding existential emptiness left behind by it a growing need for self-creation is felt, and already thematically reflected in *Frankenstein*. Perhaps what has so far in this study been called “narcissism”—the infatuation with an “idealized self-image” that in *Frankenstein* is shattered and becomes the object of revulsion and despair—is merely a reflection of a movement in the direction of self-creation, but over which God still hovers like a bad conscience. Perhaps this bad conscience is finally dispelled with Nietzsche, who heralds its dissipation once and for all and is free to embrace self-creation in a new way—which thus seems radically opposite from Shelley’s and her predecessors’. If “God is dead,” then inasmuch as one’s sense of self derives from God and has its meaning through that divine attribution, it must be viewed as the falsehood that it is, destroyed and replaced with something viable; the individual must assume the role of God for him- or herself. The shadow of foreboding and impending disaster that still seems to loom over the theme of self-creation in *Frankenstein*, negatively projected as narcissism, would finally dispel; for self-creation would then be viewed not only as positive but as a necessity. This may be the reason Nietzsche never evokes Narcissus explicitly; for Narcissus would be the figure of entrapment in a relationship with the self that, properly regarded, would really be a liberation from strictures that had defined the self, spectrally. Self-adoration may be the normal, healthy response for the superior being Nietzsche portrays, who no longer needs some transcendent phantom—the real “shadow without substance”—before whom this

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974) 181.

self must cringe in self-abnegation if it wants the benefit of the residual significance emanating from that being. Even this old definition of the “self” must be discarded, for it belongs to a past of superstitious awe: it shared in the illusion of the divine and fed off of it. Perhaps the real “split in the self” identified in *Frankenstein* is not between the idealized and the “real” self, but between the modern enlightened scientist and the transcendental somnambulant who had not yet quite awakened from an illusory past.

Whether the evocation of the Narcissus figure is an apt one or not, it is in any case surprising, as was also true of both Milton and Shelley, that so little has been written about narcissism in Nietzsche's writings. The fact alone that his “autobiography,” *Ecce Homo*, consists of chapters bearing titles such as “Why I Am So Wise,” “Why I am so Clever” and “Why I Write Such Good Books,”²⁹ might have at least merited passing comparisons. It is of course true that self-vaunting and self-enchancement are not necessarily equivalent; yet the little writing that has been done on the subject suggests the impression that it is not this sort of fine distinction but some general immunity from the association surrounding the philosopher that has inhibited the comparison, in spite of (or even by virtue of) a manner of self-expression that would seem to invite it. Altieri, one of the few scholars who has written directly on the subject of narcissism in Nietzsche, argues rather elaborately that a “highly self-conscious dimension” and the flouting of autobiographical convention in *Ecce Homo* raises such expressions above the level of

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. & ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967) 222, 236, 259.

narcissism.³⁰ Whatever complexities may underlie the tone of Nietzsche's vaunting self-characterization in *Ecce Homo*, this section will focus instead on the less obviously self-conscious expression of narcissism in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*—expression which, while less overt than in Nietzsche's obviously self-referential writing, is more foundational to his philosophy.

In the literary works alluding to the Narcissus story already discussed, it was possible to focus on moments in the narration which contained a clear allusion to the myth (or to a reference to it), and from there to draw into the discussion other passages and narrative elements elaborating the theme. This is of course not true of Nietzsche's works for reasons already pointed out; however it is possible to begin an analysis with a passage in which the theme is most clearly pronounced. Such a passage occurs in the midst of Nietzsche's discussion of the "Herrschermoral" ("master ethic," more usually referred to as the "vornehme Werthungsweise,"³¹) and his contrast of this with the "Sklavenmoral" ("slave ethic," also often called the "*Ressentiment*"³²). The *Herrscher-/Sklavenmoral* dichotomy pervades Nietzsche's exposition of the origins of morality, the history of which he felt explained the current moral morass into which he considered European society to have sunk as a result of the usurped ascendancy of the *Sklavenmoral*.

³⁰ Charles Altieri, "Ecce Homo: Narcissism, Power, Pathos, and the Status of Autobiographical Representations." *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* (Boundary) 9.3 (1981): 394.

³¹ "Vornehme Werthungsweise" is translated as "aristocratic valuations" in the translation used in this study (*GM* 171 and elsewhere), though this doesn't entirely capture the sense. It means something closer to "the noble manner of evaluating or judging." For purposes of succinct reference, "noble valuation" seems a good compromise.

³² French for "resentment," so called because, according to Nietzsche, those of the "Sklavenmoral" gain their sense of identity by contrasting themselves with those of the "vornehme Werthungsweise," whom they resent.

Eschewing any pretense of objectivity—always a pretense in Nietzsche's view—the philosopher expresses contempt, even hatred for the “Menschen des *Ressentiment*,” portraying them as poisonous and hypocritical moralists, hate-driven weaklings who through some inexplicably successful insurrection have gained the upper hand over their superiors in the eternal struggle for power. These “Menschen des *Ressentiment*” cling to the *Sklavenmoral* to protect themselves and to maintain their power, defining themselves as “die Guten” on the criteria of the slave morality, and more importantly, by contrast with those whom they have branded as “die Bösen”: those of the “vornehme Werthungsweise”—the strong, powerful, free, high-spiritedly cruel, healthy ones of the world. In this passage, these noble ones are portrayed as reveling in themselves, for they have no need of reference or comparison to any other.

Das Umgekehrte ist bei der vornehmen Werthungsweise der Fall: sie agiert und wächst spontan, sie sucht ihren Gegensatz nur auf, um zu sich selber noch dankbarer, noch frohlockender Ja zu sagen—ihr negativer Begriff “niedrig” “gemein” “schlecht” ist nur ein nachgebornes blasses Contrastbild im Verhältnis zu ihrem positiven, durch und durch mit Leben und Leidenschaft durchtränkten Grundbegriff “wir Vornehmen, wir Guten, wir Schönen, wir Glücklichen!” (*ZGM* 26-27)

The opposite is true of the aristocratic valuations: such values grow and act spontaneously, seeking out their contraries only in order to affirm themselves even more gratefully and delightedly. Here the negative concepts, *humble* [low], *base*, *bad*, are late, pallid counterparts of the positive, intense and passionate credo, „We noble, good, beautiful, happy ones.“ (*GM* 171)³³

This passage is key in the characterization of Nietzsche's ideal: the “noble” ones are imbued with real virtues, unlike the specular ones fashioned through contrast with them

³³ In this passage, “durch und durch mit Leben und Leidenschaft durchtränkten Grundbegriff” might be more literally rendered, „basic concept [by which Nietzsche is referring to the self-concept of the „vornehme“] saturated through and through with life and passion.”

and ascribed to themselves by the weak—”die Ohnmächtigen” or “faint-hearted” ones, as Nietzsche often refers to them (*ZGM* 29 and elsewhere)—for the purposes of maintaining their power. There is something strangely essentialist—considering Nietzsche's anti-essentialist stance, of which more will be said later—not only in Nietzsche's conceptualization of the “noble” ones of the world and their “real” virtues,³⁴ but also in the sense that power is theirs by right and not by false design, as with those of the “Sklavenmoral.” A certain blessedness hovers around Nietzsche's “noble” ones: a sublime quality that seems to borrow from both heroic mythology and from Christian notions of saintliness (or rather, perhaps, from original innocence)—though it is also clearly conceived as the antithesis of the latter. Christian-like virtues and their antithesis are both present in the two faces of the “noble” ones, for whom Nietzsche reclaims the designation of “good”:

wer jene “Guten” nur als Feinde kennen lernte, lernte auch nichts als böse Feinde kennen, und dieselben Menschen, welche so streng durch Sitte, Verehrung, Brauch, Dankbarkeit,...[und] die...im Verhalten zu einander so erfinderisch in Rücksicht, Selbstbeherrschung, Zartsinn, Treue, Stolz und Freundschaft sich beweisen,—sie sind nach Aussen hin, dort wo das Fremde, die Fremde beginnt, nicht viel besser als losgelassne Raubthiere...sie treten in die Unschuld des Raubthier-Gewissens zurück, als frohlockende Ungeheuer...(30)

anyone who knew these “good ones” only as enemies would find them evil enemies indeed. For these same men who, amongst themselves, are so strictly constrained by custom, worship, ritual, gratitude,...who are so resourceful in consideration, [self-control,] tenderness, loyalty, pride and friendship, when once they step out of their circle become little better than

³⁴ It would be reasonable to ask here whether Nietzsche means to assert that the values he extols are more “real,” or whether he means to promote them merely by boldly positing them. While Nietzsche never directly asserts their “reality,” in this passage he does at least rhetorically imply their existence by emphasizing their independence: their lack of need for reference to anything else (without the need for contrast, as with the “Sklavenmoral”).

uncaged beasts of prey...They revert to the innocence of wild animals
[exultant monsters]... (*GM* 174)

The division of identities here might begin to sound familiar at this point, for it is strongly suggestive of the same split we have already encountered—the self-idealizing split that always seeks to have it both ways. In the real world, the existence of virtues such as Nietzsche enumerates, in those who—as Nietzsche goes on to imagine his “noble” ones doing—indulge in “Mord, Niederbrennung, Schändung, Folterung mit einem Übermuthe und seelischen Gleichgewichte” (*ZGM* 30) (“murder, arson, rape, and torture, jubilant and at peace with themselves [in good cheer and equanimity of spirit]”) (*GM* 174), is at best evidence of an appalling ability to compartmentalize; those who commit such acts are not considered (by non-Nietzscheans) the less monstrous—perhaps rather more—for the virtues they selectively practice among themselves and their own. In Nietzsche's philosophy, such flexibility of moral behavior instead depends on a new conception of “innocence”—another term he reclaims by applying his own definition. Nietzsche's concept of “zweite Unschuld” (“second innocence”) is both of central importance to the new morality he calls for, and has deep theological resonances: an underlying sense that Nietzsche's noble “Raubthier” is worthy of reclaiming dominion over the Paradise from which he has been driven depends upon it. Although we will return to this idea of “second innocence” at a later point, it is worth pointing out here the striking analogy between this concept and Narcissus' reflection. As we recall in the analysis of that story, this was a “negative” reflection of Narcissus in the sense that it negated what was ugly in himself, and like a photographic negative, even reflected an opposite image of this aspect of him. Likewise “second innocence” (in German “Unschuld,” or “un-guilt”) is both a negative virtue (or can be viewed as such) and

essentially the opposite of the freedom from conscience even upon engaging in the sorts of crimes Nietzsche imagines his noble ones committing. The idea of “second innocence” is also an example of points at which Nietzsche “borrows back” from the values he repudiates, to lend to the figure he creates a dignifying and redeeming dimension.

In spite of the well-conceptualized, fleshed-out image he creates, it is also fascinating that Nietzsche seems to be talking entirely in the abstract: no one in particular seems to exemplify these virtues whose vividness leaves them in no need of an antithesis by which to define themselves.³⁵ It is clearly an ideal that Nietzsche is putting forward here³⁶—one seemingly more real for its lack of reference to anything outside itself. Never in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* does Nietzsche offer a model for his noble “Raubthier,” even though it looms over his work like the displaced hero whose time has come. Specific figures whom Nietzsche mentions as having in some way embodied this ideal—such as Napoleon or Wagner—are presented as fallen examples of this ideal, or are part of a more romantic past.

Perhaps even more to the purpose of this analysis in this passage is the kind of ecstatic self-appreciation in which Nietzsche imagines his ideal type. Nietzsche's depiction of them as somehow singing their own virtues to themselves might simply be a

³⁵ Nietzsche's characterizations of the “blonde Bestie”(ZGM 30) or “blonde Raubthiere” (78) are highly suggestive of a particular race, but also give little more indication of any specific individual or group who might be serving as an example of the sorts of virtues being extolled. (Presumably not all blonds are “blonde Bestien.”)

³⁶ The impression that Nietzsche has in mind an ideal in humanized form is reinforced linguistically and grammatically in the passage quoted. Throughout this passage he personifies an idea—the “vornehme Werthungsweise”—repeatedly referring to it with the feminine pronoun “sie”—only at the end suggesting he is talking about a real group of people, who refer to themselves with the pronoun “wir.”

literary way of presenting the virtues themselves; but it is clear that a kind of self-exultation is part of their blessed state. It is interesting to note the emphasis Nietzsche lays upon self-sufficiency: contrast with inferior beings might be a pale enhancement to the blissful self-regard of the noble ones, but is far from being necessary to it. Also interesting, in contrast to every other instance of narcissistic rapture we have encountered, there is no unsatisfied longing in the self-enjoyment Nietzsche imputes to the noble “Raubthier;” it is a kind of narcissism in fulfillment. At the same time, without this contrast with a type of people to whom the noble “Raubthier” is being compared, such self-appreciation might seem a bit absurd. The lack of need for any reference beyond itself is essential to the ideal being projected—for if the self-concept of the noble ones depends upon contrast with the weaklings, then they are no better than those they (or Nietzsche) despise, who must compare themselves to others for their self-conception—yet this also leaves such self-appreciation without a basis or context. Even at the rhetorical level, as it occurs here, such self-idealization does not bear scrutiny. Without the contradictions that such an ideal can allow itself it is without substance. The self-enchancement of those of the “vornehme Werthungsweise” is as spectral as the literary instances so far examined; but Nietzsche portrays it as somehow real, natural and valid, notwithstanding a certain semi-mythologized aura with which he surrounds it.

Idealization characterizes many aspects of Nietzsche's “Raubvogel-Mensch”³⁷ It is present in the implication that the noble ones have suffered at the hands of their

³⁷ Nietzsche's metaphors for “Menschen der vornehmen Werthungsweise”—including “Raubthiere,” “(blonde) Bestie[n], etc.—are used interchangeably, with differences in emphasis, imagery and rhetorical effect but little apparent distinction in reference. “Raubvögel” is used in a passage in which the “Menschen des Ressentiment” are compared to lambs and the noble ones are imagined as prey birds (*ZGM* 34).

inferiors through the “Sklavenaufstand” (“Slave insurrection”): “Alles, was auf Erden gegen 'die Vornehmen', 'die Gewaltigen', 'die Herren', 'die Machthaber' gethan worden ist” (*ZGM* 22) (“Everything that has been done against the noble ones, the violent, the masters, the powerful ones of this earth.”)³⁸ It also characterizes a sort of golden time Nietzsche posits in the past, in which this ideal type of human flourished, before shame became attached to cruelty:

Im Gegentheil soll ausdrücklich bezeugt sein, dass damals, als die Menschheit sich ihrer Grausamkeit noch nicht schämte, das Leben heiterer auf Erden war als jetzt, wo es Pessimisten giebt. (57)

On the contrary, it should be clearly understood that in the days when people were unashamed of cruelty, life was a great deal more enjoyable than it is now in the heyday of pessimism [when there are pessimists]. (GM 199)

Though accurate in sense, “life was a great deal more enjoyable” is considerably more prosaic than “das Leben heiterer auf Erden war,” which has more the tone of a romanticized origin myth; and the strong suggestion of innocence has particular resonances of the Biblical story of Paradise before the knowledge of good and evil. This was humankind's “first innocence,” and the descent from this into moralization and shame is described in terms subtly suggestive of the Fall:

Die Verdüsterung des Himmels über dem Menschen hat immer im Verhältnis dazu überhand genommen, als die Scham des Menschen vor dem Menschen gewachsen ist...ich meine die krankhafte Verzärtlichung und Vermoralisirung, vermöge deren das Gethier “Mensch” sich schliesslich aller seiner Instinkte schämen lernt. (*VGM* 57).

The sky overhead has always grown darker in proportion as man has grown ashamed of his fellows [the shame of one person before another has

³⁸ Translation is my own.

grown]...the bog of morbid finickiness and moralistic drivel which has alienated man from his natural instincts. (*GM* 199)³⁹

Idealization is also present in the longing Nietzsche expresses for a time when this overturned hierarchy will be put right again. When the gloom of God and the morality God represents are finally dispelled, the human animal will be free to follow its instincts, and cruelty will no longer be cause for shame. Nietzsche characterizes atheism as humankind's "second innocence," its first innocence having been the long prehistory in which humans could take pleasure in cruelty without the sense that there was anything wrong with it:

Ja die Aussicht ist nicht abzuweisen, dass der vollkommene und endgültige Sieg des Atheismus die Menschheit von diesem ganzen Gefühl, Schulden gegen ihren Anfang, ihre *causa prima* zu haben, lösen dürfte. Atheismus und eine Art zweiter Unschuld gehören zu einander. (*ZGM* 84)

It also stands to reason—doesn't it?—that a complete and definitive victory of atheism might deliver mankind altogether from its feeling of being indebted to its beginnings, its *causa prima*. Atheism and a kind of "second innocence" go together. (*GM* 124)

Again the sort of Biblical tone and associations of this passage lend to the power of its declarations; there is a distinctly romantic sense attached to this return to nature that verges on religious fervency—though a probably self-conscious sense of irony in the associations is also not absent. Nietzsche's tone may reflect a certain romanticization hovering around the still fairly recent clarity over humankind's animal nature; he might be excused for reflecting an early stage in the understanding of evolutionary psychology. Even so, there are many fascinating aspects about this passage that can be critiqued on

³⁹ As the translator has here taken considerable liberties with this last sentence—and is perhaps even more extreme than Nietzsche in tone—I offer an alternative translation: "I mean the sickly enervation and moralizing by virtue of which the human animal has learned finally to be ashamed of all its instincts."

the philosopher's own terms. First, rather than overthrowing hierarchies altogether, which would be consistent with Nietzsche's anti-idealistic stance, he only seems to impose a new hierarchy in place of the old: in positing that the suffering brought about by human cruelty towards one another is somehow superior to the suffering of repressed instincts towards cruelty. The revulsion he expresses in his descriptions of the moralistic morass into which he considered society to have sunk unmistakably asserts that hierarchy. Second, the whole question of superiority aside, he does not seem to question the assumption that the sort of morality he calls for—which might have been possible at least in a sparsely populated world inhabited by marauding tribes—would be at all tenable in a modern civilization. Finally, there seems to be no question that people, once having developed a social conscience, could be so easily disabused of it—again the whole question of the desirability of such a development aside, or of whether this would resemble anything like what is normally called “innocence.” Nietzsche's assertions about the return of a golden age of unencumbered barbarity bespeak a sweeping idealization whose compelling quality seems to raise it above the need for evidence, examination or consideration of consequence.⁴⁰

Perhaps the greatest irony of the idealism reflected here and elsewhere in *Zur Genalogie der Moral* is how at odds it seems with Nietzsche's status as the anti-idealistic

⁴⁰ It could be objected here that these passages are characterized by the sort of hyperbole that has been identified as a defining characteristic of Nietzsche's philosophy: that something less extreme and deleterious to society, such as a greater degree of individualism, is meant. But Nietzsche has specifically advocated for conscience-free cruelty in several passages, and it is difficult to see how more of that—in whatever attenuated form it might be understood—could have been (or could be) tolerated in Nietzsche's time or in any other.

philosopher, as well as the express purpose of his own philosophy as he himself states it, for example, in *Ecce Homo*:

To overthrow idols (my word for ideals)—that rather is my business. Reality has been deprived of its value, its meaning, its veracity to the same degree as an ideal world has been fabricated...The lie of the ideal has hitherto been the curse on reality.⁴¹

Nietzsche mounts a spirited attack on idealism in *Zur Genalogie der Moral*, devoting an entire section of the book to exploring the „fabrication of ideals“—that is until fear of suffocation forces him to break off his investigation: “Ich halte es nicht mehr aus.

Schlechte Luft! Schlechte Luft! Diese Werkstätte, wo man Ideale fabriziert—mich dünkt, sie stinkt vor lauter Lügen” (*ZGM* 38); (“But I’ve had all I can stand. The smell is too much for me. [Bad air! Bad air!] This shop where they manufacture ideals seems to me to stink of lies”) (*GM* 181). Nietzsche seems to be referring here specifically to the “das asketische Ideal,” which is admittedly very different from the sort of ideal he is putting forth—arguably the opposite of it. But this is only true in content and spirit. Nietzsche never delineates what he means qualitatively by “idealism” or “ideals,” he only describes the “ascetic ideal” itself. If this alone is what he means by “ideals” then there is no reason to generalize about them, and doing so is deceptive. If on the other hand he means ideas that are assigned a higher status and ascribed some essential existence or general validity upon which to base principles and judgments, it is difficult to see how the kinds of “ideals” apparent in Nietzsche's philosophy are different from this. Nietzsche himself calls the way of thinking and behaving he extols a “Werthungsweise” (“way of evaluating”); and at one point, he speaks of “vornehmere Ideale” in place of the

⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 33-34 (hereafter cited as *EH*).

“vornehme Werthungsweise” (*GM* 25). How this squares with his claim not to favor one ideal over another is not clear: “I erect no new idols” (*EC* 394). Some cross-textual inconsistency, such as ostensibly rejecting all ideals while occasionally slipping and applying that term to his own ideas, could be overlooked if the abhorrence he expresses towards what he calls “idealism” were not so fierce and unequivocal—or alternately if it were qualified in some way that did not make it appear contradictory. But careful distinctions of meaning are not in the spirit of his invectives against idealism and idealists, whom he calls “Schwarzkünstler, welche Weiss, Milch und Unschuld aus jedem Schwarz herstellen...Kellerthiere voll Rache und Hass” (*VGM* 38), (“black magicians, who precipitate the white milk of loving-kindness [produce whiteness, milk and innocence] out of every kind of blackness...vermin, full of vindictive hatred”) (*GM* 181). Such extreme language eschews the need for clarity of definition that would be necessary to validate his judgments, and thus conceals behind fiery rhetoric the fact that it is only a quarrel over attitudes he is carrying on. He is not exposing idealism per se for the sham that it is; he is only asserting another value system against it, and discrediting it by invalidating a category of ideas (idealism) to which his own also belong.

To return momentarily to the larger literary comparison being posited, we might ask whether the similarity between Nietzsche's denunciations of idealists and Frankenstein's vituperations against his creature is entirely coincidental. According to the foregoing analysis of Shelley's novel, Frankenstein's abhorrence of his creature was not based on his creature's villainy alone, which is made highly ambiguous in the novel; in part it was also based on the bitter disappointment of his ambitions that the creature represented. Through his hatred of the creature Frankenstein could preserve some

remnant reflection of the grandiosity that had driven him even after his ambitions had been shattered: in thematic terms, when the glorified self-image he sought in his great project returned instead an image of monstrosity—something opposite of what he sought in it. There is a mysterious likeness in the fact that Nietzsche execrates an idealism that is the opposite image of his own, even while the two images have common elements. In a curious way, Nietzsche's “vornehme Whertungsweise” and his “Sklavenmoral” are shadow images of each other in a way analogous to that in which Frankenstein's creature is a shadow image of him—or, more thematically relevant, the shadow image of his ideal self embodied in his failed ambitions. And just as Frankenstein must reject the hated part of himself still reflected back in his creature by demonizing him, so Nietzsche inveighs against an ideal reflecting an image (of himself?) which he wishes to reject, in favor of an idealized one he embraces. The “split in the self” evident in both Frankenstein and Narcissus is evident in Nietzsche's *Herrscher-Sklave* dichotomy.

The comparison between Nietzsche and the character of Victor Frankenstein aside for a moment—a comparison that requires further justification and to which certain objections must be addressed—the idea of a “split in the self” in the philosophical voice of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* between the weakling moralists and the noble “Raubthiere” has support in the observations of certain writers on Nietzsche. First, the comparison implies that Nietzsche might have had some reason to identify (and to deplore his identification) with those of the “Sklavenmoral,” a possibility that is suggested by what Abenheimer relates about Nietzsche's reportedly gentle and kind nature: “He always said that sympathy and pity gave the greatest temptation to him to betray his philosophical

principles.”⁴² This is corroborated by Frazer, according to whom “Nietzsche repeatedly complains in his correspondence that 'Schopenhauer's “compassion” has always been the major source of problems in my life.’”⁴³ Frazer interprets Nietzsche's critique of compassion as “central not only to his almost oedipal struggle with his 'great father,' but also to his futile struggle to purge the sympathetic sentiments from his own tormented soul” (Frazer 51). That Nietzsche should have agonized at all about aspects of himself that ran counter to his philosophical principles is something of a curiosity, considering that he rejected the existence of a self, soul or subject where such a betrayal by one's personal attributes could take place: “...es gibt kein solches Substrat” he says of the subject, “es giebt kein 'Sein' hinter dem Thun, Wirken, Werden; der Thäter ist zum Thun bloss hinzugedichtet—das Thun ist Alles” (*ZGM* 35); (“But no such agent exists; there is no 'being' behind the doing, acting, becoming; the 'doer' has simply been added to the deed [doing] by the imagination—the deed is everything”) (*GM* 178-79). Nevertheless, this apparent contradiction between these reputed attributes of Nietzsche's and his philosophical principles has led Benedetti to posit a “splitting” in Nietzsche's identity:

Meine psychologische Deutung der Triebfeder des asketischen Immoralisten ist die, dass Nietzsche sich in seiner Ambivalenz gegen dasselbe Überich auflehnte, mit welchem er sich in der Bekämpfung der depressiven Schwäche identifiziert. Diesen Widerspruch konnte er nicht anders lösen als dadurch, dass er eine Art ‘splitting’ in seinem Überich durchführte....⁴⁴

⁴² Karl M. Abenheimer, Narcissism, Nihilism, Simplicity and Self (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991): 77.

⁴³ In the same article, Frazer characterizes the significance of Schopenhauer's “compassion” in philosophy generally, and for Nietzsche in particular, as “perhaps the most thorough philosophical defense of a pure 'Mitleids-Moral'—an altruistic system motivated entirely by compassion” (Frazer 51).

⁴⁴ Gaetano Benedetti, “Die narzistische Problematik bei Friedrich Nietzsche,” Narzissmus beim Einzelnen und in der Gruppe, ed. Raymond Battegay (Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1989) 18.

My psychological interpretation of the motivating forces of the ascetic immoralist is that Nietzsche, in his ambivalence, rebelled against the same superego with which he identified in his struggle with depressive weakness. He couldn't solve this contradiction in any other way than through a kind of 'splitting' in his superego. (My translation)

This "splitting," according to Benedetti, divided him between a side of him that affirmed the vitality with which he identified, and one upon which he projected his self-suppression. The rejection of his latent weaknesses led to self-aggression, transformed and directed against others: the moralists, Christians, the weak; against conventional values and traditions (Benedetti 18). Whatever may be the validity of such a psychological analysis, it is striking that the split Benedetti identifies in Nietzsche, which has strong support in reports about him, bears such close analogy to that identified in the literary comparison with the character of Victor Frankenstein.

Nevertheless, as has been already mentioned, this comparison requires further justification, and certain possible objections must also be addressed. First, since Nietzsche does not place himself into the text of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* in the same way as a character like Frankenstein is placed in the novel, inasmuch as Nietzsche himself identifies with the idealized image reflected in the noble "Raubthier," this must be established in some other way than is obvious in Shelley's story, where Victor Frankenstein's identification with his idealized image is clearly thematized. This identification is evident in a passage in which Nietzsche clearly aligns himself with the strong and healthy ones, where he declares the necessity of separating the "healthy" from the "unhealthy" to avoid contamination:

Und darum gute Luft! gute Luft! Und weg jedenfalls aus der Nähe von allen Irren- und Krankenhäusern der Cultur! Und darum gute Gesellschaft, unsre Gesellschaft! (ZGM 124)

Then let us have fresh air, and at any rate get away from all lunatic asylums and nursing homes⁴⁵ of culture! And let us have good company, our own company! (GM 261)

The outcry of “good air! good air!” (rendered somewhat less dramatically in the translation used here) and apparent dread of asphyxiation by the sick in this passage recalls the similar outcry in the “Werkstätte, wo man Ideale fabrizirt” (ZGM 38) discussed earlier, further clarifying Nietzsche's identification with the healthy anti-idealists of the “vornehme Werthungsweise.”⁴⁶ It also suggests a somewhat paradoxical phobia of what he abhors; for if the noble ones are as firm in their identity as Nietzsche has portrayed them, what fear is there of becoming infected by the weak and sickly ones of the *Ressentiment*? This passage conveys both a direct identification of the philosophical voice of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* with the strong and aggressive figure praised throughout the work, and gives a glimpse of the fragility of that identity whose wholeness and solidity have been emphatically asserted.

Another possible objection to the comparison between the narcissistic split in the self discussed with regard to *Frankenstein* and the *vornehme Werthungsweise*-

⁴⁵ Literally “hospitals;” in German, “sickhouses.”

⁴⁶ This passage is the only one in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* in which the philosophical voice explicitly identifies with the *vornehme Werthungsweise*. However, the identification is felt throughout; and it is particularly pronounced in passages such as the aforementioned in which Nietzsche imagines the scornful reply of the “Raubvögel” towards the “lambs,” who censure their morality: “wir sind ihnen gar nicht gram, diesen guten Lämmern, wir lieben sie sogar: nichts ist schmackhafter als ein zartes Lamm” (34); (“We have nothing against these good lambs; in fact, we love them; nothing tastes better than a tender lamb”) (GM 178). The passage is both an echo of the „noble Raubthier's” paradoxical assertion of superior disregard of the weak moralist's perspective, established through his self-contrast with that perspective, and the insertion of the philosophical voice into the predatorial figure.

Ressentiment dichotomy in Nietzsche, is that while it might be fair to characterize Frankenstein's ambitions as narcissistic, since he is expressly seeking glory and renown, it might be asked whether the comparison with Nietzsche is fair when the latter is assuming an unpopular position. While thematically speaking Frankenstein can be said to be seizing the spirit of the times and joining himself to its pursuits,⁴⁷ Nietzsche presents himself more as the lone anti-idealistic voice in a culture paralyzed by the toxicity of the ascetic ideal, and the ideal personality he puts forward is presented as the underdog in the current state of things. In as far as such an objection might be made, it would be necessary to view Nietzsche's philosophy in its context, when the discarding of morality based on ideals might have seemed the way of the future in an age when humankind's radical animal nature had been established, but before social Darwinism had discredited itself as a model for human society to follow. The continuance of a social morality in which ideals such as compassion, peace and justice would play a central role was far from a foregone conclusion in Nietzsche's time, and it is entirely imaginable that the first philosophical voice to herald their overthrow as guiding values might have considered itself as prophetic as, in the semi-fictitious world of *Frankenstein*, a scientist on the verge of reanimating dead tissue might see himself as heralding a new and glorious scientific age destined to conquer mortality.

Once again, the most important difference between the vision that splits Frankenstein's identity in his fictitious world and that which leads to Nietzsche's division of identities in his philosophical one is a difference of orientation: Frankenstein's is a

⁴⁷ "They [the modern scientists] penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places," Frankenstein's teacher M. Waldman tells him in the novel, speaking the words that inflame his ambitions (Shelley 53).

disappointed vision; Nietzsche's is a hopeful one. Frankenstein sees, as soon as he has succeeded in realizing his scientific dreams, that the aspirations he had invested in them were folly; or, speaking in terms of the Narcissus theme, he is horrified by the reality that self-idealization has brought about, which is the negative image of what he had imagined it to be. As we have already seen, this does not quite wake him up from himself; it is more like a nightmare that haunts sleep without dispelling it. Nevertheless it is disillusionment, which is something Nietzsche's vision of the ascendancy of the idealized anti-idealist is not. Nietzsche speaks of this coming age with longing strongly redolent of religious fervor, and even imagines this ideal “Mensch der Zukunft” as a kind of Messiah:

Dieser Mensch der Zukunft, der uns ebenso vom bisherigen Ideal erlösen wird...vom grossen Ekel, vom Willen zum Nichts, vom Nihilismus...der den Willen wieder frei macht, der der Erde ihr Ziel und dem Menschen seine Hoffnung zurückgibt, dieser Antichrist und Antinihilist, dieser Besieger Gottes und des Nichts—er muss einst kommen. (*ZGM* 90)

This man of the future, who will deliver us...from a lapsed ideal [i.e. the “ascetic ideal”]...from violent loathing [disgust], the will to extinction [nothing], nihilism...who will make the will free once more and restore to the earth its aim, and to man his hope; this anti-Christ and anti-nihilist, conqueror of both God and Unbeing—one day he must come.... (*GM* 230)

The religious resonances of this passage are sufficiently obvious that they don't require much pointing out; however one particularly relevant example of Nietzsche's borrowing back the colors of a discarded canvas, for use in painting the world he imagines, lies in his sense of “restoring to the earth its aim.” Since the banishment of God is central to the ideal future Nietzsche portrays, it no longer makes sense within this framework to speak of an overarching “aim” for the world that is not imposed on it—and any “aim” imposed would be in conflict with another's aim for it, and thus not overarching—so that

“restoring to the earth its aim” sounds entirely at odds with the tenets of Nietzsche's own philosophy;⁴⁸ yet such an aim is also essential to his vision.

Benedetti has noted a curious lack of content in Nietzsche's reformist vision. He quotes Hirschberger's observation that whenever Nietzsche speaks about this brighter future, “[es] zeigt sich das alte Bild: die Aufgabe wird gestellt, die Forderung in immer neuen Worten erhoben, wie schön und gross das alles wäre, aber dabei bleibt es auch: der Inhalt fehlt;” („the same picture emerges: the challenge is laid, the demand raised in ever new wording, how beautiful and great everything would be, but it stops at that: the content is missing.”)⁴⁹ The observation of a lack of content is highly interesting considering the characteristics of idealization discussed throughout this paper. It is perhaps even more interesting for the fact that where Nietzsche does specify particulars about his ideal world, it is primarily in negative terms; we know relatively little about it except what it is not. Presumably it is a world dominated by those of the “vornehme Werthungsweise,” and its ethic higher and more heroic, it seems, than contemporary preoccupations with “die Heraufkunft der Demokratie, der Friedens-Schiedsgerichte an Stelle der Kriege, der Frauen-Gleichberechtigung, der Religion des Mitleids und was es

⁴⁸ This observation, however, must take into account the possibility that Nietzsche only means that this aim for the world is restored for those of the “vornehme Werthungsweise” and not for the whole earth (having made it abundantly clear that not everybody is “vornehm”). If this is the case, it is another moment strongly establishing the identification of the philosophical voice with the “noble valuation,” and is nonetheless an instance in which a way of regarding the world (its purposefulness), which would really need to be discarded under the philosophical terms Nietzsche has established—especially as it is couched here in terms that sound universal—endures in the philosopher's world view and is enlisted in his rhetorical purposes.

⁴⁹ J. Hirschberger, “Nietzsche, Umwertung aller Werte,” in Geschichte der Philosophie (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), Vol. II, 501-26. Quoted by Gaetano Benedetti, “Die narzistische Problematik bei Friedrich Nietzsche,” Narzissmus beim Einzelnen und in der Gruppe, ed. Raymond Battagay (Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1989) 17. (My translation.)

sonst Alles für Symptome des absinkenden Lebens giebt” (*VGM* 156); (“the advent of democracy, of arbitration courts in place of wars, of equal rights for women, or a religion of pity [or compassion]—to mention but a few of the symptoms of declining vitality”) (*GM* 290-91). What these higher purposes might be, against which causes of peace, justice and compassion pale, are left to the imagination. Those lower purposes are in Nietzsche's view the priorities of the bourgeois herd, and have their origins in the morality that Nietzsche has been attacking throughout *Zur Genealogie der Moral*; they are part of the real world Nietzsche knew. This passage is another instance in which idealization seems to substitute for content, and the idealized world presents a kind of negative image of the real one and apparently has no content of its own. The world of the noble “Raubthier” is the opposite of what Nietzsche claimed about his hero: it acquires its identity by contrast.

To return to the aforementioned passage in which Nietzsche longs for a brighter future, in what follows immediately upon this passage Nietzsche makes it clear that he sees himself in the “prophetic” and not the “messianic” role of the “Mensch der Zukunft” who will bring it about:

An dieser Stelle geziemt mir nur Eins, zu schweigen: ich vergriffe mich sonst an dem, was einem Jüngeren allein freisteht, einem “Zukünftigeren”, einem Stärkeren, als ich bin... (*ZGM* 91)

I've reached the term of my speech [at this point, only one thing is fitting, to be silent]; to continue here would be to usurp the right of one younger, stronger, more pregnant with future than I am... (*GM* 230)

The identification of the philosophical perspective with the interests of the „Mensch der Zukunft” is strongly felt here, even while the identification with that figure is disavowed. The passage is not without a sense of pathos. It is as close as Nietzsche ever comes to

expressing the sort of defeat of his ideals that, for example, Frankenstein expresses; and it is not without the sense of tragedy in Narcissus' never having his beloved.. The comparisons are not entirely arbitrary. It is true that Nietzsche's vision of the future is not at all diminished by the admission that realizing it must be left to someone younger and stronger. But if it no longer makes sense to speak of an overarching purpose for the world under the terms the philosopher has established, then what use is it to the voice speaking that such a future should ever be realized? What kinship does he bear to those who stand to benefit by it? The meaningfulness in the analogy with the prophetic role the philosopher is serving dissolves when that role can no longer be said to speak for some larger universal purpose—and such purpose has supposedly never been pretended: it has always been for the noble “Raubthier” that the philosopher speaks, and against everyone who is against “him.” Yet the philosopher seems to imagine this aim exists, and has some more encompassing significance than the benefit of those whom it would benefit—a group that itself has no clear identity, but is certainly not everybody. For purposes of the thesis being argued, the self-admission that the philosophical voice is acting out the role of “prophet” who foresees, and not of “messiah” who fulfills, does not argue against the assertion that the “Mensch der Zukunft”—the “vornehme Werthungsweise,” the noble “Raubthier”—is an idealized reflection of Nietzsche himself; for it has been argued all along that the idealized reflection of the self need bear no resemblance to the “real self”—to the reality of who one really is, or in this case even who one has the potential to be. In this passage particularly, the two appear tragically distinct.

With the sort of fervency attached to the hoped-for ascendancy of the “vornehme Werthungsweise” and the personality characterized by it, as well as the negative view

expressed towards compassion generally, it is not surprising that lack of feeling and hostility are expressed towards those who are not characterized by this superior mindset. This hostility is clear in several passages already cited that express disgust for the weak and portray the heroic “Raubvögel” praying upon them in good conscience. We have also encountered Nietzsche's oddly phobic anxiety lest those of the superior mindset should become infected by the weak and confuse themselves with them. This anxiety is sufficiently intense that Nietzsche calls for a complete separation of the “high” and “healthy” from the “sick” and “lowly” (the same dichotomy of “vornehme” and “ohnmächtige” referred to earlier):

Dass die Kranken nicht die Gesunden krank machen...das sollte doch der oberste Gesichtspunkt auf Erden sein:—dazu aber gehört vor allen Dingen, dass die Gesunden von den Kranken abgetrennt bleiben, behütet selbst vor dem Anblick der Kranken, dass sie sich nicht mit den Kranken verwechseln. (*ZGM* 124)

Our first rule on this earth should be that the sick must not contaminate the healthy. But this requires that the healthy be isolated from the sick, be spared even the sight of the sick, lest they mistake that foreign sickness for their own [confuse themselves with the sick]. (*GM* 261)

This passage has deep resonance with regard to the theme being explored; for the idea that the “healthy” are in danger of confusing themselves with the “sick” is a sort of opposite image of Narcissus, who also misinterprets the image he sees, but fails to see it as himself. It bears more direct and perhaps more profound analogy with Frankenstein, who beheld the image in which he had invested his sublime ambitions and saw something horrific instead. One of the remarkable aspects of that moment in Shelley's novel was the fragility of Frankenstein's ambitions (and the self-idealization they represented): “dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!” (Shelley 61). The same

sort of fragility is observable here. Once again setting aside the whole question of a social ethic calling for such a quarantine—as well as a hierarchy of nobility forbidding the degradation of the higher by putting them at the service of the lower (“das Höhere soll sich nicht zum Werkzeug des Niedrigeren herabwürdigen” [124])—and the quality of this imagined society, what is of interest in the present inquiry is the sense of instability about it: an instability expressed in the need to erase those excluded and rendered worthless by the values of the “vornehme Werthungsweise.” At the end of the same passage, Nietzsche asserts the need of the healthy ones to “defend ourselves” (“uns...vertheidigen”) against the two worst scourges threatening them: “gegen den grossen Ekel am Menschen! Gegen das grosse Mitleid mit dem Menschen!...” (*ZGM* 124); (“against...unrelieved loathing of man and unrelieved pity of him!”) (*GM* 261). Behind this seems to lurk the conflict referred to earlier by Abenheimer, who claimed that Nietzsche regarded sympathy and pity as temptations to betray his philosophical principles (Abenheimer 77). Again this suggests comparison with Victor Frankenstein, in his flight from his creation. Earlier in this analysis that abandonment was interpreted as the shunning of the “real” other Frankenstein had brought to life—and whose existence he owed and denied acknowledgment—in order to maintain some semblance of the idealized self, the pursuit of which drove Frankenstein to create him. There is almost a precise analogy here, for unlike the noble, healthy ones whose depiction throughout Nietzsche's work has had something of a mythical quality about it,⁵⁰ those being called “sick” and “lowly” here—who inspire loathing—undoubtedly have their referents in the

⁵⁰ A particularly vivid synopsis of this personality that conveys well its semi-mythical quality describes it in terms of its “rohen, stürmischen, zügellosen, harten, gewalthätig-raubthierhaften Gesundheit und Mächtigkeit” (*ZGM* 125), (“raw, stormy, unbridled, hard, violently predatorial health and power”) (my translation).

real world. Frankenstein's lack of feeling for the “real other” of that story, which inspires his creature to reproach him with heartlessness and curse him (Shelley 121), is also apparent in Nietzsche, with the difference that Nietzsche betrays an inclination to acknowledge and feel for the “real other”—an inclination Frankenstein rarely and only briefly expresses. But this inclination Nietzsche seems to feel the need to combat—when not through a portrayal of the weak and lowly of the world as the sick-minded and hate-filled adversaries of his noble “Raubthier,” then by advocating a cultural quarantine against them. In passages already examined, Nietzsche carries out a kind of vicarious campaign of violence against them through his noble “Raubthier,” and with the overthrow of the slave ethic he imagines a kind of ghettoization of the inferior ones; for their very existence is an affront to the human ideal he puts forward—this must be spared the very sight of them. Like Frankenstein’s creature, and for that matter Echo in Ovid’s story also, the “real other” in Nietzsche’s work—“die Ohnmächtigen,” the weakling and poisonous moralist—haunts the work, and seemingly the conscience of the writer:

Sie haben die Tugend jetzt ganz und gar für sich in Pacht genommen, diese Schwachen und Hielllos-Krankhaften, daran ist kein Zweifel:...Sie wandeln unter uns herum als leibhafte Vorwürfe, als Warnungen an us,—wie als ob Gesundheit, Wohlgerathenheit, Stärke, Stolz, Machtgefühl an sich schon lasterhafte Dinge seien, für die man einst büssen, bitter büssen müsse...(VGM 122)

They have by now entirely monopolized virtue [these weak and incurably sick ones, there is no doubt of it];...They walk among us as warnings and reprimands incarnate, as though to say that health, soundness, strength, and pride [and sense of power] are vicious things for which we shall one day pay dearly...(GM 259)

An unacknowledged sense of bad conscience in the philosophical voice of *Zur*

Genealogie der Moral is a powerful current that is felt throughout the work. It is true that

Nietzsche has a considerable amount to say about the bad conscience, and not all of it is

purely negative (or at least not completely inauspicious). He explains the bad conscience as the inevitable suffering resulting when mankind was wrenched from a state of nature and placed within the strictures of civilization:

Ich nehme das schlechte Gewissen als die tiefe Erkrankung, welcher der Mensch unter dem Druck jener gründlichsten aller Veränderungen verfallen musste, die er überhaupt erlebt hat,—jener Veränderung, als er sich endgültig in den Bann der Gesellschaft und des Friedens eingeschlossen fand. (*ZGM* 76)

I take bad conscience to be a deep-seated malady to which man succumbed under the pressure of the most profound transformation he ever underwent—the one that made him once and for all a sociable and pacific creature [when he found himself shut in within the confines of society and peace]. (*GM* 216).

According to his argument, when aggression and cruelty were no longer deemed acceptable within the confines of society, mankind turned it inward (an argument that Freud seems to have adopted from Nietzsche, or perhaps from the intellectual consensus the idea had won). This became the bad conscience. A few sections later, Nietzsche compares the bad conscience to a pregnancy: “Es ist eine Krankheit, das schlechte Gewissen, das unterliegt keinem Zweifel, aber eine Krankheit, wie die Schwangerschaft eine Krankheit ist” (*ZGM* 81). (“There can be no doubt that bad conscience is a sickness, but so, in a sense, is pregnancy [but a sickness such as pregnancy is a sickness]”) (*GM* 221). He does not expound on the comparison, but from what follows he seems to mean that the bad conscience was a necessary evil that mankind had to endure in the progression towards some greater fulfillment: the age of “second innocence.” In spite of its status of unfortunate necessity in Nietzsche's philosophical framework, the extent to which a bad conscience may have infected the philosopher's own tone and colored his judgments is never hinted at in a way that suggests awareness. But a bad conscience

seems to animate the hostility expressed towards moralist weaklings of the *Ressentiment*; of these it creates caricatures of moralizing spite and hatred. And it is worth remarking that Nietzsche's own tone in speaking of the inferior ones is much more similar to the way he describes them, than it is to the manner befitting his superior personality, who is characterized more by a high disregard for the meanness of his inferiors:

Das ist das Zeichen starker voller Naturen, in denen ein Überschuss plastischer, nachbildender, ausheilender, auch vergessen machender Kraft ist (ein gutes Beispiel dafür aus der modernen Welt ist Mirabeau, welcher kein Gedächtniss für Insulte und Niederträchtigkeiten hatte, die man an ihm begieng, und der nur deshalb nicht vergeben konnte, weil er—vergass). (*ZGM* 29)

It is a sign of strong, rich temperaments that they cannot for long take seriously their enemies, their misfortunes, their misdeeds; for such characters have in them an excess of plastic curative power, and also the power of oblivion. (A good modern example of the latter is Mirabeau, who lacked all memory of insults and meanesses done him, and who was unable to forgive because he had forgotten. (*GM* 173).

The voice of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* seems to have more of the “Mensch des *Ressentiment*” than is openly acknowledged. As Frankenstein’s creature continues to have a claim upon him in spite of Frankenstein's attempts to disown him, so the “Sklavenmoral” continues to have a voice in Nietzsche’s philosophy that is highly comparable: the tone of Nietzsche's invectives against the “Sklavenmoral” are not unlike Frankenstein's vilifications of his creature and his futile crusade against him. This might explain the concept of “second innocence,” which, as has already been pointed out, also harks back to the idea of “original innocence” (preceding “original sin”) of Judaeo-Christian tradition: for Nietzsche, the tradition most responsible for producing the *Ressentiment*. Characterizing a return to guilt-free cruelty as a “second innocence” could be viewed as an attempt to cleanse his own idealism, and the idealized figures who

inhabit it, of moral ugliness—much as the image that enraptured Narcissus removed that which was ugly and unlovable about him. The analogy could be carried further still; for as Narcissus' image was “a shadow without substance,” so it is worth asking what is left of Nietzsche's noble “Raubthier,” when that which is ugly from the perspective of a developed social conscience—something Nietzsche appears to have shared in spite of himself—and the idealization with which he infused it, are taken away.

From the perspective being put forward here, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* seems less like the whole-hearted casting off of morality that it professes to be and more like an expression of profound self-conflict: of a “self” deeply divided between a projection of an idealized image that one imagines, and one that haunts the self-idealizer with its realities. It is the same split that we have seen before: a gap that widens as the idealized self takes on sublime proportions. Why this self-idealization seems such an integral element of narcissism is somewhat mysterious: why a sober, more or less accurate view of who one is should not be sufficiently inspiring of self-adoration is a question worthy of reflection. The answer that suggests itself is that sober self-regard is only the healthy counterpart to the narcissistic self-flight being focused upon here. But the self-idealization that is the object of narcissistic adoration may be a substitute for something else—something larger than the self alone—for which this cannot substitute without diminishing even the self that it is. In making of itself something sublime, the self loses the substance that it has. In *Frankenstein*, as we have seen, self-idealization becomes its opposite. Frankenstein's creature is both the shadow image of the idealized self created by his ambitions, and the “other” for which the ideal self-image is substituted. Feeling for the “other” might have humanized Frankenstein; but his rejection of this other in

favor of a continuance of his ideal “self” in some form renders his creature an object of sublime loathing, which the “other” that is rejected in preference for narcissistic symmetry seems doomed to become. In Nietzsche, this dynamic is made more complex by the circumstance that the idealized self is in some ways its own shadow side; on some level. It is the weak, “die Ohnmächtigen,” “der Mensch des *Ressentiment*,” against which Nietzsche directs his ire; but in some ways his own ideal seems to be an object of repugnance as well, which he must vindicate by waging war on idealism that condemns even while it constitutes it; and by summoning a “second innocence” whose redeeming light is also borrowed from this rejected idealism. His hyperbolic style notwithstanding, it is without any apparent irony that Nietzsche evinces a fierce faith in the ideal of the noble “Raubthier” throughout *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, and he never contradicts it elsewhere in his philosophy. But under the surface, in passages such as the last one quoted at length (*ZGM* 122 & *GM* 259) and that in which he silences himself (*ZGM* 91 & *GM* 230) is felt a sort of flagging and revulsion not wholly unlike that thematized in *Frankenstein*.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this study it was suggested that Nietzsche's reversal of orientation towards the Narcissus theme might have signaled a liberation of self-creative power from the superstitious strictures of the past, particularly the artificially constructed self that was made of the same theological stuff as God. Nietzsche proclaimed the death of both self and God, and thus seemed to be heralding the final end of a chapter in the history of Western culture whose conclusion had already begun centuries before when God began to be displaced from the center of human focus. The self-abnegating shame in the face of God was false in its origins and hypocritical in its purpose; for in reality it was only frustrated aggression and natural cruelty turned inward, but was used for the self-aggrandizement of the weak who attempted to bolster their status and power and leach their own significance from the association with God. With the unleashing of long-suppressed aggression and cruelty the noble ones of Nietzsche's philosophy cast off this hypocrisy, and their self-celebration was an honest expression of a self-concept that had no more need of a God whose reign was over—and who thus could no longer protect His subjects from these new invaders whose time of conquest had come. It might have been noticed from the outset of the discussion of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* that there was a certain contradiction in this self-celebration; for if there was no “'being' behind the doing, acting, becoming”—if “the deed is everything” (*GM* 178-79), then what self-concept

were the noble Raubthiere expressing? What “self” was there to celebrate? In any case, Nietzsche seemed to be heralding at least the spirit of this new age, if not actually bringing about the changes it promised. On examination this does not seem so much the case. Under an ardent and jubilant surface there is a sense of self-revulsion at the image he has created—an image which reflected, if not Nietzsche (for he appears always—perhaps for the better—to have fallen short of his own ideal) then his idealized self-identification. Even if this were not true—even if Nietzsche were less like Frankenstein, who was horrified at what his self-idealization had brought to life, and more like Narcissus who was nothing but enchanted with his ideal image to the end—there would still be a certain despair, perhaps not entirely unconscious to the philosophical voice of the work, in having so fervently, even religiously believed in and promoted a vision of the world that cannot be said in any absolute way to be an improvement of it without the infection of the valuations that this vision purports to overthrow—and these valuations must ultimately judge Nietzsche's vision abhorrent.⁵¹ In as far as the philosophical voice of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* can be equated with Nietzsche's own, it is worth noting that in spite of the enormous influence Nietzsche has exerted on philosophy, literature and culture, in the contempt the philosopher expresses for peace, justice and compassion his vision for the future departed quite radically from the ideals towards which, up to the

⁵¹ At this point it might be useful to recall the possibility mentioned earlier in the discussion of Nietzsche's voice (footnote 24) that Nietzsche is presenting an alternative to the predominant morality of his age in order to show it to be only one morality among many possibilities. Even if this is the case and Nietzsche's main point was not the ethic he was promoting but the arbitrariness of the present one in the face of other possibilities, the success of such a demonstration would depend on the ability of that vision to stand on its own merits—an ability which, as this study hopefully has shown, there is reason to doubt.

present at least, humankind has continued, in spite of sometimes magnificent failures, to strive.

With respect to the nineteenth century in particular and the questions posed about this in the introduction, in spite of the final departure Nietzsche seems to make from God the quality of free-floating holiness left by the decentralization of the sacred is still strongly felt in Nietzsche's philosophy—it is, strangely enough, a sort of glue holding it together, in spite of the fact that it has no real place there. And through Nietzsche's concept of “second innocence” it imbues the noble “Raubthier” as well, borrowing from the Judaeo-Christian myth of a once blessed state in which human beings in their innocence shared directly in the blessedness of their Creator. In the theology presented in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* morality is the new fallenness, and the ability to murder, rape, and torture in good conscience (*ZGM* 30 & *GM* 174) the new innocence—fascinating, considering it is the idealists who are called, “Schwarzkünstler, welche Weiss, Milch und Unschuld aus jedem Schwarz herstellen” (*VGM* 38), (“black magicians, who [produce whiteness, milk and innocence] out of every kind of blackness”) (*GM* 181). But when Nietzsche declares that it is not himself who shall bring about the great change in morality he foresees, this is not only true in deed, as he seems to mean it, but also in spirit. *Zur Genealogie der Moral* expresses the kind of freedom from conscience proclaimed in it only on the surface; this ideal seems to remain as vehemently desired and as unattainable to the philosophical voice of the work as Narcissus' image was from him. To whatever extent the work has ever inspired (or may yet inspire) the kind of exultant cruelty disabused of conscience that it idealizes, it gives no reason to expect such an ideal

should ever be realized for its perpetrators, since such an ideal appears illusory even in its own manifesto.

Like *Frankenstein* and Ovid's story of Narcissus, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* portrays a deeply divided self: an identity so close and yet infinitely separated from an ideal with which it identifies. In each depiction that ideal not only takes the place of the "real self" in one's self-conception but also substitutes for a real relationship with the world outside this spectral symmetry. What the nineteenth-century portrayals of this self-idealization seem to show is that this inward relationship is haunted by self-abhorrence, which is thus expressed in abhorrence of the opposite of this idealized self—the real other. The irony in both works seems to be that the real self has more basis of identity with the real other than with the projected self: Frankenstein is more like the living being with emotional needs (and elevated style of speech) than his ideal; and Nietzsche also seems to have more in common with the "Mensch des *Ressentiment*"—perhaps even with the "incurably sick"—than with the noble "Raubthier." On an obvious level, this must necessarily be true; for as has already been seen, the idealized self is by nature spectral and without substance; it cannot contain the basis for a real identification. On another level, perhaps there is also the hint that the transcendent which one seems to seek in the projected self is in reality somehow bound up in the relationship with the other, which self-idealization represents an aborted effort to attain. This is hinted at thematically in *Frankenstein*, by the real other of that story, who tries to appeal to what should have been natural feeling in Frankenstein from the start: "Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no

misdeed” (Shelley 94). Neither work shows what this transcendence of the self might have been, they only show the narcissistic failure.

This passage brings us around to a theme touched upon at the outset and which has been an overarching theme throughout this study: the usurpation of the role of God in the nineteenth century. God was the great “Other” who imparted meaning in the theological past. Frankenstein's self-idealization places him thematically in that role in Shelley's novel—a role in which he is doomed to fail. Nietzsche too assumes that role, which by now history and cultural change seem to demand; the shadows of superstition seem to have been swept away to make room for it, and now it seems time to sweep away the enervating and pernicious values that had been cultivated in those shadows. Self-elevation to that role is only fitting, and there is no higher Authority to forbid it (it would be pusillanimous to submit to it if there were: such a consideration is beneath the noble “Raubthier”). Philosophically Nietzsche creates his vision of the world, creates beings to inhabit it and a “Werthungsweise” to replace the moral system. But the vision only really coheres by virtue of elements borrowed from the rejected vision: in reality, it is only a version of this, idealized according to the philosopher's values. Without this it dissolves, and the philosopher's prophetic role with it. But even if this were not true—even if Nietzsche were to have constructed his ideal future without imbuing it with any sense of borrowed holiness—one might still regard the result of his work and wonder whether self-idealized creation had the potential to realize anything but monstrous visions that haunt even their own creator.

WORKS CITED

- Abenheimer, Karl M. Narcissism, Nihilism, Simplicity and Self. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991.
- Altieri, Charles. "Ecce Homo: Narcissism, Power, Pathos, and the State of Autobiographical Representations." Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture (Boundary) 9.3 (1981): 389-415.
- Andreoli, Max. "Narcissus and his Double." Echoes of Narcissus. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000. 13-23.
- Barkan, Leonard. "Diana and Actaeon: the Myth as Synthesis." English Literary Renaissance 10 (1980): 317-59.
- Benedetto, Gaetano. "Die narzisstische Problematik bei Friedrich Nietzsche." Narzissmus beim Einzelnen und in der Gruppe. Ed. Raymond Battegay. Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1989.
- Burgard, Peter J.. "Introduction: Figures of Excess." Nietzsche and the Feminine. Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1994.
- Frazer, Michael L. "The Compassion of Zarathustra: Nietzsche on Sympathy and Strength." The Review of Politics 68.1 (2006): 49-78.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. "Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve." Feminist Studies 4.2 (1978): 48-73.
- Hirschberger, J. "Nietzsche, Umwertung aller Werte." Geschichte der Philosophie, Vol.2. Freiburg: Herder (1976). 501-26.
- The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Lamb, John B. "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Milton's Monstrous Myth." Nineteenth Century Literature 47.3 (1992): 303-19.
- Milton, John. Paradise Lost, in The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton. Ed. Douglas Bush. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.

- Nehemas, Alexander. Nietzsche: Life as Literature. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg). "Christenheit oder Europa." Fragmente und Studien und Die Christenheit oder Europa. Ed. Carl Paschek. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1984.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. Ecce Homo, in On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo. Trans. & Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Gay Science. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1974.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift. Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam, 2003.
- Ovid. Metamorphoses. Ed. William S. Anderson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.
- Ovid. Metamorphoses. Trans. Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955.
- Schlegel, Friedrich. Lucinde. Ed. Karl Konrad Polheim. Stuttgart: Philip Reclam, 2008.
- Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. Ed. Johanna M Smith. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.
- Soyka, David. "Frankenstein and the Miltonic Creation of Evil." Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy 33.2 (1992): 166-67.
- Spaas, Lieve. Introduction. Echoes of Narcissus. By various authors. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000. 1-10.
- Tannenbaum, Leslie. "From Filthy Type to Truth: Miltonic Myth in Frankenstein." Keats-Shelley Journal 26 (1977): 101-13.
- Thompson, Terry W. "Shelley's Frankenstein." Explicator 58.1 (1999): 22-24.
- Vinge, Louise. The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century. Lund: Gleerups, 1967